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Geo. W. Musgrave.
Sept. 18th.
1822
A
GUIDE TO CHRIST;

OR,
THE WAY OF DIRECTING SOULS
THAT ARE
UNDER THE WORK OF CONVERSION.

COMPILED FOR THE HELP OF
Young Ministers;
AND MAY BE SERVICEABLE TO PRIVATE CHRIS-
TIAN WHO ARE INQUIRING THE
WAY TO ZION.

—+— 163-1729 ✓
BY SOLOMON STODDARD, A. M.
Late Pastor of the Church in Northampton.

—+—
WITH A PREFIXED EPISTLE,
BY THE REV. DR. INCREASE MATHER.

—+—
PRINCETON, N. J.
PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM D'HART.
1827.

—
D. A. BORRENSTEIN, PRINTER.

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The following Sketch of the character of the author of this work, is taken from "Allen's American Biographical and Historical Dictionary."

SOLOMON STODDARD, minister, of Northampton, Massachusetts, was born in Boston in 1643, and was the eldest son of Anthony Stoddard, esquire. He was graduated at Harvard college in 1662. He was afterwards appointed a fellow. His health being impaired, he went to Barbadoes, as chaplain to Gov. Serle, and preached to the dissenters on that island near two years. After his return, being ordained September 11, 1672, as successor to Mr. Mather at Northampton, he continued in that place till his death, February 11, 1729, in the eighty-sixth year of his age.

As a preacher, his discourses were plain, experimental, searching, and argumentative. He was blessed with great success. He used to say, that he had five harvests; and in these revivals there was a general cry, what must I do to be saved? He was so diligent in his studies, that he left a considerable number of sermons, which he had never preached. He wrote so fine a hand, that one hundred and fifty of his discourses are contained in a small duodecimo, manuscript volume, which with the greatest ease may be carried in the pocket.

He published the doctrine of instituted churches, London, 4to. 1700, in which he advanced some sentiments that were not very well received in this country, such as the following; that the Lord's table should be acces-

(RECAP)

sible to all persons not immoral in their lives ; that the power of receiving and censuring members is vested, exclusively, in the elders of the church ; and that synods have power to excommunicate and deliver from church censures. He published also the danger of degeneracy, 1702 ; election sermon, 1703 ; a sermon on Exodus xii. 47, 48, supporting his notions with regard to the supper, 1707 ; a sermon at the ordination of Joseph Willard of Swampfield, 1708 ; appeal to the learned on the Lord's supper, against the exceptions of Mr. I. Mather, 1709 ; plea for tithes ; divine teachings render persons blessed, 1712 ; a guide to Christ, or the way of directing souls in the way to conversion, compiled for young ministers, 1714 ; three sermons, showing the virtue of Christ's blood to cleanse from sin ; that natural men are under the government of self love ; that the gospel is the means of conversion ; and a fourth annexed to stir up young men and maidens to praise the name of the Lord, 1717 ; a sermon at the ordination of Thomas Cheney, 1718 ; a treatise concerning conversion ; the way to know sincerity and hypocrisy, 1719 ; answer to cases of conscience, 1722 ; whether God is not angry with the country for doing so little towards the conversion of the Indians, 1723 ; safety of appearing at the judgment in the righteousness of Christ ; this work was republished at Edinburgh, 8vo. 1792, with a commendatory preface by Dr. Erskine.

TO THE READER.

THAT preparation for Christ is necessary, before the soul can be united to him by faith, is an undoubted truth. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Men must be convinced of their being sinners, or they will not be in bitterness for it: sin must be bitter to them, or they will not forsake it. As long as they love their sins, it is impossible that they should believe on Christ, Joh. v. 44. Nor will they come to Christ for righteousness and life, except they have an humbling sense of their own unrighteousness, Rom. x. 3. These are truths that cannot be denied. But whether there is any preparatory work which is saving before faith, has been controverted among divines. My learned tutor, (whom for honour's sake I mention,) Mr. Norton, (once a famous teacher in Boston,) in his *Orthodox Evangelist*,* has elaborately proved

the negative, with whom the worthy author of the ensuing discourse does concur. It has been an error, (and a tyrannical one,) in some preachers, that they have made their own practical experiences a standard for all others ; whereas God is pleased to use a great variety in bringing his elect home to Christ, although conversion, as to the substance of it, is the same in all that are brought into a state of salvation. Some have experienced such terrors, and distress of conscience, as others have not been acquainted with, who, nevertheless, are true believers on Christ. To that question, what measure of preparatory work is necessary to conversion ? Mr. Norton* answers judiciously. As the greatest measure has no necessary connexion with salvation, so the least measure puts the soul into a preparatory capacity, or ministerial disposition next to the receiving of Christ. There is not the like degree of humiliation in all those that are converted, for some feel a greater measure of trouble, others a lesser,

* Orthodox Evang. p. 160, 161.

but all that are truly converted, are humbled. Nor can it be determined how long a man must be held under fears and terrors before he is truly converted. To affirm, that men must be so many years or months under a spirit of bondage, before they can believe on Christ, is contrary to the experience of many pious souls, and to the scriptures. The preparatory work of the converts mentioned in the sacred writings, was not of long continuance. That supereminent divine, Dr. Thomas Goodwin,* observes, that a man may be held too long under John Baptist's water; and that some have urged too far, and insisted too much on that, as preparatory, which includes the beginning of true faith. Such authors as have asserted, that men cannot be sincere converts, except they have been some considerable time under great legal terrors, have caused groundless fears, and perplexity in the minds of many gracious souls, for the relief of whom, Reverend Mr. Firmin published an excellent book, entitled, 'The Real

* In his preface before Mr. Hooker of preparation.

Christian. Very often the children of godly parents, who have had a religious education, and been kept from all scandalous sins that wound and waste the conscience, have been favoured with an easy, as well as with an early conversion. The seed of grace has sprung up in their hearts, they know not how, Matt. iv. 27 : so as that, although they can say, as the blind man restored to his sight did, one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see, yet the particular time they cannot account for. It is (says Mr. Norton,*) our duty to bless God, that we are converted, and not groundlessly to afflict ourselves about the time of our conversion. And he cites Mr. Pemble, whose words are, to tell the month, day, or hour, wherein they were converted, is in most converts impossible : in all, of exceeding difficult observation ; though I deny not, that the time may be in some, of sensible mark. That eminent man of God, Mr. Baxter,† relates that he was once at a meeting of many Christians, as eminent for holi-

* Ubi supra, p. 162. † Of infant Baptism, p. 129. 133.

ness as most in the land, of whom divers were ministers of great fame, and it was desired that every one of them would give an account of the time and manner of his conversion, and there was but one of them all that could do it. And, (says he,) I aver from my heart, that I neither know the day, nor the year, when I began to be sincere. Nevertheless, for the most part, they that have been great sinners, are not converted without dreadful terrors of conscience. Our great Hooker, (of whom Dr. Goodwin says, that if any man in this age came in the Spirit of John Baptist, Hooker was the man,) says this doctrine,* will be found a sad truth, viz. that as for gross and scandalous sinners, God usually exercises them with heavy breakings of heart, before they are brought to Christ. Especially it is so, if the Lord intends to make use of them in great services, for his name. Saul, (afterwards Paul,) had a terrible conversion, although he was not long in the pangs of the new birth. The like has not been noted of

* Sermons on Acts ii. 37.

Luther. Famous Mr. Rogers* of Dedham, had been very extravagant in his youth. Mr. Richard Rogers, of Wethersfield, who was his kinsman, helped to maintain him at the university, where he sold his books, and spent the money, so that his kinsman and patron would have utterly cast him off, had not the entreaties of a near relation prevailed with him to try him once again. When he saw what a wonderful change converting grace had made on his young kinsman, he would often say, I will never despair of a man for John Rogers' sake. God designed that this very ungodly youth should be made a great instrument of glory to his name, and of good to many of his elect. He was not bruised to no purpose under the hand of the Almighty. Great were the terrors of his soul for some time, when he would get alone under bushes in the field, praying and crying unto God for mercy. When he was converted, it is thought he was an instrument of converting more souls, than any one minister in England. He was

* See Mr. Firmin's Real Christian.

inspired with an extraordinary zeal ; had a way of delivering himself in his sermons, which in any other man would have been ridiculous, but in him it was very becoming and awful ; which made Bishop Browning say to Mr. Ward, John Rogers will do more with his wild note, than we shall do with all our set music. But this is God's usual method, with such of his elect as have fallen into great sins ; he brings them home by great terrors. For the confirmation of this, I might have instanced Mr. Bolton, whose excellent books have made him famous in the church of God. Before his conversion he was very wicked. He loved stage-plays, cards, and dice ; was a horrible swearer, sabbath breaker, a boon companion, that neither loved God, nor good men ; he hated puritanical preaching. Hearing the fame of Mr. Perkins, he went to Cambridge to hear him preach, and having heard him, said, He was a barren empty fellow, and a passing mean scholar.

This man, after his conversion, was an eminent saint, and a successful Minister of Jesus Christ. But the manner of his con-

version was terrible. His sins were so heavy upon him, that he roared for anguish of heart, would sometimes rise out of his bed in the night for anguish of spirit ; and to augment his misery, he was afflicted with grievous temptations, *horribilia de Deo, terribilia de fide*. These heart-piercing sorrows continued for many months. They issued in a sound conversion.

There have been some who maintained, that a man is not sufficiently prepared for Christ, except he be brought to that pass, as out of respect to the will and glory of God, to be content to be damned eternally. A horrid assertion, justly disclaimed by the author of this discourse, and refuted by the Orthodox Evangelist ;* yet there are some unhappy passages of that nature, in a book of humiliation, which goes under Mr. Hooker's name, by which incredible wrong has been done to that great author. It may be, it will be to the satisfaction of some readers, to see what Dr. Goodwin has written concerning Mr. Hooker's books about preparation for Christ, who, in his epistle prefixed to Mr. Hooker's sermon on Acts ii. 37. has

* Chap. 7. p. 151.

these words : ‘There has been published long since, many parts and pieces of this author, upon this argument, sermon-wise, preached by him here in England ; yet having been taken by an unskilful hand, who upon his recess into these remoter parts of the world, was bold, without his privity or consent, to print and publish them, (one of the greatest injuries that can be done to any man,) it came to pass that his genuine meaning in points of so high a nature, and in some things different from the common opinion, was delivered in those printed sermons, different from the fair and clear draught of his own notions and intentions, because so utterly deformed and misrepresented in multitudes of passages, and in the rest but imperfectly and crudely set forth.’

That which the doctor says, is a sufficient vindication of the renowned name of Mr. Hooker, from the reflections cast upon him on account of some rude expressions in those books pretended to be his, which were never printed with his allowance. The like is to be said with reference to some passages in Mr. Shepard’s Sincere

Convert, which have occasioned great disquietment in some godly minds, and made them afraid to believe on Christ, when deeply sensible of their misery without him. Concerning which book Mr. Shepard, in a letter to Mr. Firmin, dated December 27th, 1647,* expresses himself thus: ‘That which is called the Sincere Convert, I have not the book; I once saw it. It was a collection of such notes in a dark town in England, which one procuring of me, published them without my will or privity; nor do I like to see it. He that published it, confesseth it came out altered from what was first written.’

It is usual with new converts to be molested with fears, lest they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. I am far from being of Dr. Tillotson’s opinion, who supposeth, that none in these days are, or can be guilty of that sin; nor any besides those who were eye-witnesses of the miracles wrought by our Saviour Christ. I rather concur with Dr. Collings, whose words are: ‘Give me leave to speak my fears. I profess they are my thoughts, that we live

* See the *Real Christian*, p. 214. *Discourse of Providence*, p. 559.

—in an age as full of persons that have sinned that sin that shall never be forgiven, as any age ever was, since our Lord was on the earth. Are there not many in our days, who having been once enlightened, have not only sinned against the light of their education, but are become malignant haters of those holy truths and ways of God in which they were initiated, and malicious persecutors of all such as profess the true and pure Gospel? Do not such sin wilfully after they have received the knowledge of the truth? And have they not done despite to the spirit of grace?’

As for such as are troubled with groundless fears of their having been guilty of that sin, the Reverend author of the discourse, united herewith, has therein offered that which may ease and satisfy their disquieted consciences. Mr. Baxter, notwithstanding the dispute which had been between him and Mr. Tombs about Pædo-Baptism, after that, wrote a commendatory epistle before a learned book of Mr. Tombs’ against the papists.

It is known that in some points (not fun-

damental in Religion,) I differ from this beloved author. Nevertheless, as when there was a difference of opinion between Jerome and Austin, Jerome said, for all that, I cannot but love Christ in Austin; so do I say concerning my brother Stoddard. And I pray the Lord to bless this, and all his holy labours, for the conversion and salvation of many of God's elect.

INCREASE MATHER.

Boston, November 15th, 1714

PREFACE.

THE work of regeneration being of absolute necessity unto salvation, it greatly concerns ministers, especially, in all ways possible to promote the same ; and in particular, that they guide souls aright who are under a work of preparation. Some there be, who deny any necessity of the preparatory work of the Spirit of God, in order to a closing with Christ. This is a very dark cloud, both as it is an evidence that such men have not the experience of that work in their own souls ; and as it is a sign that such men are utterly unskilful in guiding others that are under this work. If this opinion should prevail in the land, it would give a deadly wound to religion, it would expose men to think themselves converted when they are not. If men do understand that there is a work of humiliation before faith, then if they get some common affections, love, sorrow, delight, yea, and a com-

mon faith too, they will say, these are not of the right kind ; for men must see the plague of their own hearts, their helplessness, and that they are like clay in the hand of the potter, before they come to Christ, and so will be afraid, and be searching of themselves. But if they do not know any necessity of preparation, they will take the first appearance of holiness for holiness ; and if they find religious affections in themselves, they will grow confident that God has wrought a good work in them. It would likewise expose them to bolster up others in false confidence. A man that knows there must be a work of preparation, will be careful how he encourages others that they are in Christ ; he will inquire how God has made way for their receiving Christ. But another that is a stranger to it, will be ready to take all for gold that glisters, and if he sees men religiously disposed, will be speaking peace to them. He will be like the false prophets, saying, peace, peace, when there is no peace. So men will be hardened. It is a dismal thing to give men sleepy potions, and make them sleep the sleep of death.

The truth of this opinion is much to be suspected from what has been left on record to the contrary, by Hildersham, Perkins, Dodd, Sibbs, Bains, Dike, Ball, Preston, Hooker, Shepard, Norton, and others of the like stamp, whose judgment in matters of this nature does outweigh the judgment of thousands of others, though otherwise learned men. But besides this, there is a great deal of light held forth in the word of God, in this matter. I will not argue from Israel's being led by Moses, the lawgiver, out of Egypt, through a land of pits and droughts, and fiery flying serpents, before they were brought into the land of Canaan by Joshua : nor from the legal dispensation of the covenant of grace foregoing the evangelical : nor from John Baptist's being sent as a forerunner of Christ to prepare the way of the Lord : nor from the parable of the prodigal, being in want, and becoming a servant of a citizen of the country before he returned to his father : nor from the dry bones being in a disconsolate condition, before God put life into them. These things may better be made use of for illustrations than proofs.

But there are other Scriptures which hold forth, that there must be preparation for Christ before our closing with him. It does appear by instances recorded in the Scripture. One is of Paul, Acts ix. 4, 5. He was terrified, in way of preparation to his receiving Christ, and about the same time was led into the understanding of his own helplessness, Rom. vii. 9. Another is of the jailer, Acts xvi. 29, 30, 31. He was greatly scared, lest he should fall short of salvation. And since we have such instances, and none to the contrary, we may well judge that this is God's method in converting sinners. It also appears from such doctrines as are held forth in the Scripture: as that some sinners are near the kingdom of God, and others are far from it. Mark xii. 34. This shows that some men are in a more prepared way, and more hopeful to receive it than others. So that doctrine, that some are not in a present capacity to come to Christ, because under the power of a carnal design, John v. 44. This shows that men must be broken off from their carnal designs before they come to Christ. So

the doctrine of the difficulty of getting into a state of salvation, Matt. vii. 13. Luke xiii. 24. This shows that there be many difficulties in the way of conversion ; and that by striving, they may get into a nearer preparedness for faith.

It also appears by that prophecy of our Saviour, where it is foretold that God will first prepare men, and then bring them to Christ, John xvi. 8. Here it is foretold what method the Spirit will take with men. He will not reveal the righteousness of Christ to men in the first place ; but in order to this, he convinces them of sin, makes them see their danger and miserable condition. First he searches the wound, and then applies the remedy. It appears also by the particular application of the call of the Gospel to those that are prepared. Sometimes the call is propounded generally to all ; but at other times it is propounded particularly to such as are in distress by reason of their sins, that see themselves miserable and undone, Matt. xi. 28. Isai. lv. 1. Rev. xxii. 17. The call is applied particularly to these, as being in the next capacity to give entertain-

ment unto it ; intimating the condition that men must be in, before they do receive it.

Experience also gives considerable light in this matter. We learn by experience, that men's hearts are generally set for carnal things before they are terrified, and for their own righteousness before they see their own hearts. Generally such men as have not had the terrors of God in them, do not much mind eternal things. If they be not rude and vicious, yet they are worldly, vain, and proud, Eph. ii. 3. And such convinced sinners as have not been led into the understanding of their hearts, are set to build up a righteousness of their own. They are taking encouragement from their frames, with a neglect of Christ. Experience also shows that many men highly reputed of for religion, have had a work of preparation. Many men, that have a special interest in the hearts of others, can give a fair account how they have been prepared for Christ. And many professors, that have not had such experience have not proved well. Several that have had some light touches of conviction, though they have made a blaze awhile,

yet have proved themselves carnal men at last; or at least have rendered themselves much suspected. Many, that have been strangers to the work of preparation, have cracked their credit at last, Matt. xiii. 20, 21. Yea, many godly people do know that they were hypocrites, and never saw Christ, till after they had a work of humiliation. They knew they were not godly, though they had affections, enlargements, and encouragements; it was all common work, and they had no spark of grace in them. Their religion was but the fruit of nature improved, Rom. vii. 9. Yea, this is exceeding agreeable to reason. The light of nature cannot give a demonstration of it; for it is a voluntary dispensation. There is no necessity in nature of any preparation before the infusion of grace. Christ changed the water into wine, and raised the dead to life, without any previous preparation. So he can do in this case. The work of preparation does not make the work of the new creation the easier; for after men have a work of preparation, sin reigns in them as much as before: preparation does not at

*A little preparation
does not make the work of the new creation the easier; for after men have a work of preparation, sin reigns in them as much as before: preparation does not at*

all destroy the principle. Men, when prepared, can do nothing to help God in planting grace in them, and men that are not prepared, can do nothing to hinder God in implanting grace. But yet it is very agreeable to reason, that the Spirit do work a work of preparation, before it does infuse grace: for it is the duty of ministers to preach such things to sinners as are proper to work this preparation. They are bound to preach the threatenings of the law, man's insufficiency, and God's sovereignty. Yea, the manner of God is to deal with men after the manner of men. Man is a rational creature, and therefore God deals with him in a moral way, setting convictions before him. Men would make enemies submit before they pardon them: so does God. Besides, it is the duty of the sinner to do those things wherein preparation does consist. It is their duty to seek God, to reform, and to make an absolute resignation of themselves to God. No wonder then if God holds them to it. Yea, further, there is an absolute necessity in nature, that men be prepared before the exercise of faith. Men cannot ex-

ercise faith, till the heart be prepared by a sense of danger, and the insufficiency of other things. If they do not see their danger, they can see no occasion they have to come to Christ. If they do not see themselves liable to wrath, how can they come to Christ to save them from wrath? As long as they imagine that they can help themselves, they will not come to Christ for help. Men cannot trust in Christ alone, till driven out of themselves. They cannot come as helpless and undone, until they see themselves so, Phil. iii. 3.

And seeing there is such a work of preparation foregoing men's closing with Christ, it must needs be of great consequence for awakened sinners to be guided aright under this work. If men have the best guides, yet they may miscarry ; but undoubtedly many do perish for want of suitable help. Some, after they have been in trouble a while, do grow discouraged, under apprehensions that their seeking will be in vain, and so leave off endeavouring after a converted estate. Some wander up and down under fears and hopes, as the children of

Israel in the wilderness, until they die. They cannot be quiet in a way of sin, neither can they find a way of deliverance. And many others, after a little trouble, are comforted under a notion of being at peace with God. Unskilful churgeons make a palliate cure, and persuade them that the bitterness of death is past. Multitudes of souls perish through the ignorance of those that should guide them in the way to heaven. Men are nourished up with vain hopes of being in a state of salvation, before they have got half the way to Christ.

Those therefore whose business it is to lead souls to Christ, had need furnish themselves with skill and understanding to handle wounded consciences in a right manner, that they may be serviceable to them in their distresses. Who would venture his ship with an unskilful pilot? Who would venture his wounded body with an unskilful churgeon? Who would willingly put his distressed soul into the hands of an unskilful minister? Men should not satisfy themselves with other points of learning, but labour after that that may speak words

in season to every one that is weary: that, as Moses said to his father-in-law, they may be instead of eyes to them that are in the wilderness.

There are two things especially serviceable to this end.

One is, that they get experience of this work in their own hearts. If they have not experience, they will be but blind guides. They will be in great danger of entertaining false notions concerning a work of conversion. They will be inclinable to think there is not so much necessary as is, in order to conversion. They are in danger to be deceived with pretences of men's being delivered from their own righteousness, with shows of humiliation, faith, and love. Whatever books men have read, there is great need of experimental knowledge in a minister. Many particular things will occur, that he will not meet withal in books. It is a great calamity to wounded consciences, to be under the direction of an inexperienced minister.

The other is, to be acquainted with the observations of those who have travelled

much in this work. If a man have experience in his own soul, that will not reach all cases that may come before him. There is great variety in the workings of the Spirit, and in the workings of men's hearts under the convictions of the Spirit: and men that have had to do with many souls in their distresses, may afterwards meet with such difficulties as may puzzle them very much. Therefore it is of great use to get the knowledge of the observations of those who have had to do with a great variety of cases, whereby they may get a larger understanding how to manage themselves, when they are difficultly circumstanced. This small treatise, composed upon the desire of some younger ministers, is offered to the consideration of such as do desire to be further instructed in the right way of dealing with distressed souls. And if the author shall be hereby the instrument of the salvation of any perishing souls, he shall count his labour well bestowed.

DIRECTIONS

HOW TO GUIDE SOULS THROUGH THE WORK OF CONVERSION.

FIRST.—When a sinner wounded in spirit does apply himself unto a minister of the gospel for counsel, it is profitable, after some inquiries, concerning the time, means, and degree of his convictions and terrors, to use this method with him.

I. To confirm and establish him more in the apprehensions of the dangerousness of a natural condition : showing him that every man that dies in a state of nature, will certainly be damned ; that a state of damnation is intolerable ; that the continuance of his opportunities for deliverance is very uncertain. For there is danger that if his convictions be not cherished, they may by degrees wear off. Many men's terrors are but short-lived. They harden their hearts.

by company, clogging themselves with worldly business, and their natural disposition to flatter themselves.

II. To encourage him to be in the use of means in order to his conversion : for if he has not hopes of obtaining mercy, either he will not seek after it, or he will do it in such a dull and careless way, that it will come to nothing. God leads men through the whole work of preparation, partly by fear, and partly by hope. If they run into either extreme, to have fear without hope, or hope without fear, they are like a ship that goes beside the channel, and is in danger to be broken in pieces. A mixture of fear and hope makes men diligent. They may be encouraged from such considerations as these : that God has provided a glorious way of salvation through Christ ; that all that do believe in him shall be saved ; that there is an infinite ocean of mercy in the heart of God ; that God has had compassion on many greater sinners than they ; that the day of grace is not yet gone ; that God is now striving with them by his spirit, which is many times the forerunner of conversion.

III. To direct him what course to take at present. As,

1. Daily to seek God in secret. As this is a duty, so it is a special mean to cherish the motions of God's spirit in his heart. If this be neglected, it would be no wonder if his convictions should die away. He is also to be directed not to content himself in putting up some good requests to God ; but he should open his case plainly before God, as he would to a physician if he were sick. This is a way to keep him from wandering thoughts in prayer, and further to affect his own soul with his condition. Isaiah lv. 6. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.

2. To reform his life, and not to indulge himself in any sins of omission or commission ; in any external sins ; nor in doing good actions in a sinful manner. Men that are seeking salvation, must not allow themselves to go on in a way of damnation. That terror is not sufficient that will suffer men to live in an unreformed life. If men be thoroughly scared, they will dread doing what wounds their consciences. Fear of hell will make men afraid to sin. If

they be thoroughly wounded, those temptations that formerly carried them away, will be overcome, Luke xiii. 10. 12. 14.

3. To lay himself open to the convictions of the Spirit. Sometimes men are desirous to be convinced and terrified, but not so much. They would overrule their convictions, as to time and degree. But as a patient leaves himself in the hand of the surgeon, so should they, in the hand of the Spirit, when it pleases him, not shutting their eyes against the light, John iii. 20.

Second. After the awakened sinner has been using means awhile, he oftentimes gives an account of some alteration. He finds some affections, sorrow for sin, delight in sabbaths, love to the people of God, love to reading the scriptures. What is to be said to him in this case?

I. He is to be told, that he must not rest in ease, but labour after healing. If a wise man, by applying plasters to a sore, be delivered from much of the anguish that he was in, he will not satisfy himself with that, and give over the use of means, lest the anguish should return again. So the

sinner had need be careful that he does not satisfy himself in the case of his conscience, but must get it healed by the application of the blood of Jesus Christ.

II. It is extremely dangerous to tell him that it is hopeful God has put the seeds of grace in him. There is not one in a thousand, but does experience such religious affections long before he is converted. These religious affections are nothing else but the workings of self-love and natural conscience. Natural conscience discovers the danger of sin, and somewhat of the baseness of it; hence he is sorry for it. The man conceives some hope that by praying, reading, &c. he shall get salvation; hence he delights in them. The man hopes that he has been accepted of God; hence he has some affections to him. And if a minister does but speak encouragingly, as if the man were converted, he lays a foundation for his ruin; for he is in great danger to fall in with the flattery.

III. He is to be warned against a self-righteous spirit. Men are exceeding ready to think that their good works, and reli-

gious frames, will abate the fierce anger of God, and incline God to pity them, and have mercy on them. They are proud of their services, ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, and of the freedom of God's mercy. They think God cannot love them unless they be lovely ; and that he cannot but love them if they be lovely ; and so they are ready to dote upon their own righteousness, Rom. x. 3. They go about to establish their own righteousness. Therefore the man is to be warned against this ; and light is to be held forth to him, to convince him of the insufficiency thereof.

IV. He may be put upon to examine these affections, whether they be not in hypocrisy ; and signs may be given to him, whereby he may discern them to be so. But there had need be great care that the signs be sound and warranted by the word of God ; otherwise he is in danger to be established in his mistake.

Question. Are sinners that are awakened to be directed to labour to work up their hearts to sincere sorrow for sin, and love to God and Jesus Christ ?

Answer. 1. If their terrors are great, they are ready of themselves to labour to do this from a self-righteous spirit, that they may win the heart of God, and assuage his anger. They commonly take a great deal of pains in order thereto, that they may work up gracious qualifications in themselves. They set spiritual considerations before themselves, read and hear, and use all the methods that are in their power to enliven their own hearts.

2. It is a presumptuous thing for them to strive for this, for it is impossible for them to work up such things in their own hearts. They are dead in sins, and cannot sanctify themselves. No principle that they have, will produce such an effect. Fear will not make them do it: the fear of hell cannot make men hate sin more than hell. Self love will not make them love God above themselves. They cannot, by consideration, work any such effect upon their hearts, for they do not understand spiritual things. Encouragements will not make them do it, for it is beyond their power.

Resolutions will be ineffectual. They may as easily remove mountains as to do this. Therefore it is they should not strive to work their own hearts to it.

3. There can be no benefit to such directions, but only this, that they may find by experience their own inability ; that after they have done their utmost, they may by their experience understand their own helplessness. It is the duty of men to love God, and to repent of sin ; and it is the duty of sinners to labour that they may love God and repent of sin, &c. ; but it is not in their power to work up their hearts to the love of God, and godly sorrow. They should labour to be convinced they cannot do it.,

Third. Sometimes it is much to be suspected that they do not reform all that is amiss. And in this case ;

I. The danger of a natural condition is to be solemnly set before them. Though their terrors seem to be great, yet they need to be greater. Men must have so much terror, as to bring them to a separation from

sin. Therefore there is need to represent their danger in the most lively and dreadful way, that the sense thereof may pierce their hearts deeply. If they be but thoroughly scared, they will be brought to an universal reformation, Is. ii. 20, 21.

II. They are to be urged to reformation. Their duty in this matter is to be particularly pressed upon them. Their consciences must be stirred to part with all sin, as Christ urges the Jews, Matt. v. 29. ‘If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out.’ For, the neglect of reformation will put a stop to the work : and they will not get forward in the work of humiliation, till they are reformed. As the first concoction prepares for the second, so reformation does for humiliation. Men must overcome the next and more immediate difficulties before they overcome those that are remote. He that will not part with sinful practices, will not yield himself into the hands of justice. If they do not reform, they put the work to a stand ; yea, such men do aggravate their own sorrows ; for trouble will lie upon them till their hearts are brought to be

lumbled ; and their terrors will be multiplied, if they belong to God, till they are persuaded to reform. Psalm xxxii. 3. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day.'

Fourth. Sometimes some particular sin lies exceeding heavy upon his heart. In this case the minister may tell him,

I. That it is not his duty in ordinary cases, to publish such sin to him. It is fit he should confess it to God ; but ordinarily there is no just occasion to publish a scandal to him. It is best that secret sins be kept secret, except the circumstances of the person do call for the making of it known.

II. That the sin is pardonable. This he may demonstrate from several examples in the Scripture ; from the sufficiency of Christ's redemption ; from several offers and promises of the gospel ; that the man's heart may not sink with discouragement.

III. That in case the rule does call for any satisfaction to men, he must not delay that ; but that must be attended to as soon as there is opportunity. If he can make satisfaction without confession, there is no necessity for confession ; for satisfaction

answers for the wrong that has been done a man.

IV.—That he must not be sensible of that sin only, but of all other sins; every sin being provoking to God, and deserving damnation. And particularly, that his impenitency and unbelief is more dangerous than any former act of sin. John iii. xix. This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.

Fifth. Sometimes, after the man has been in trouble awhile, before he has any great experience of his own heart, he has some promises come to him with a great deal of refreshing; and he hopes God has accepted him. In this case the minister may tell him,

I. That it is a common thing for God to give encouragements unto men before they are carried through the work of conversion; that as God gives them encouragement by his word, so he does many times by his spirit. God always maintains in the hearts of sinners that are seeking of him, some hopes that they may obtain mercy. And

sometimes he gives them very great refreshing, by some sense of the glory of heaven. Luke xiv. 15, by some superficial discoveries of Christ, Matt. xiii. 20, thereby holding forth some promises before them, the design whereof is to draw them on in a way of seeking, and to support them under their temptations.

II. That God never gives a faith of assurance before he gives a faith of dependence ; for he never manifests his love, till men are in a state of favour and reconciliation, which is by a faith of dependence. When men have comfortable scriptures come to them, they are apt to take them as tokens of God's love. But men must first be brought unto Christ, by accepting the offer of the Gospel, before they are fit for such manifestations. God's method is first to make the soul accept the offers of grace, and then to manifest his good estate unto him.

III. That if this comfort be not of the right kind, it will not continue. And usually after such encouragements, men's terrors are wont to return with as much violence as ever. God commonly intermin-

gles smiles and frowns, and if such vain confidences as men take up from refreshing scriptures, be but nipped in the bud, they generally quickly wither away ; and their fears return as strong as ever.

Sixth.—When the sinner was hoping that he was in a good estate, because some refreshing scriptures came to him, and sees his mistake, he is in danger to be discouraged. In this case he may be told,

I. That it is a common thing for persons that are afterwards converted, to pass through such changes. It is not a peculiar thing to him, but a thing of ordinary experience in such people as God is about to deliver out of a natural estate. They commonly have some lightsome times, and then returns of darkness. There was no reason to expect that that should last very long. Such comforts are like Jona's gourd, that rise in a night and perish in a night.

II. That it is a great mercy that those confidences are taken away from him. Had they continued, they would have ruined him. False confidence is better lost than kept. His condition is the more hopeful,

now those confidences are lost While he had those confidences, he was like a ship that stuck in the sand ; and now he is delivered from them, there is more ground of encouragement.

Seventh. After he has had affection and enlargement for awhile, he is wont to complain that he grows more dull, and he is afraid that his convictions are about to leave him. In this case he may be told,

I. That there is no reason to expect that his convictions should always be in the like degree. Persons in such a condition, are subject to many alterations, as it is with a ship at sea ; sometimes it has a fair wind, sometimes it blows more moderately, sometimes it is becalmed ; yea, sometimes it has storms and cross winds. There be many changes that pass over such men. So men in a journey, have sometimes good way, sometimes bad ; they meet with rivers and miry places where they cannot make speed.

II. That he must be very careful that he does nothing to quench the motions of the spirit, 1 Thes. v. 19. There be many ways whereby men do it ; sometimes by discou-

ragement, sometimes by presumption and flattery, sometimes by rebelling against the light, sometimes by company-keeping. Men that are much addicted to company, do commonly lose their convictions ; so by crowding themselves with worldly business. Though diligence be no hinderance, yet cumbering of themselves will be a great impediment to the abiding of convictions.

III. That it is his best way to improve the conviction that he has. Sometimes persons are wont to argue, that it will be to no purpose for them to strive. If they have not greater convictions, they shall but tire themselves to no purpose ; and they conceive it best for them to tarry till they have stronger convictions. But the seaman is wont to hoist the sail, and improve the wind he has, whether it be more or less. If men improve moderate convictions, they may get forward, and do that which will further their conversion. And if they do improve lesser convictions, that is the way to have more. It is their duty to do it, and in that way God owns them. To him that hath shall be given. Some that have complained of the

smallness of their convictions, have within a little while changed their note, and complained as much of the greatness of them, that they were such, that they could hardly live under them.

Eighth. A person that is under the work of conversion, is subject to many affrightments, and discouraging temptations. A dreadful sound is in his ears. All such persons have not the same temptations, and they have them not in any certain order; but care must be taken to give suitable support and advice to them, according to the variety of their temptations.

I. One temptation is, that he is not elected; but God has overlooked him, and appointed him to condemnation; this sometimes lies upon the heart with great weight.

In this case he may be told,

1. That those things that make him fear that he is not elected, are no certain signs of it, there be no certain tokens of reprobation upon him. Those things that he takes to be signs, are very uncertain. The greatness of his sins do not argue his reprobation. Many that have been guilty of great sins

have been elected. His being of elderly years does not argue it. Sometimes God turns such to himself, Mal. iv. 5, 6. God's leaving him still in a natural estate, though he has sought God a long while, does not show it. Israel was a long while travelling from Egypt to Canaan.

2. That it is a sinful thing for him to draw any conclusions about his election. It is a secret reserved in God's own breast, and he cannot determine any thing understandingly about it. Deut. xxix. 29. Secret things belong unto the Lord our God. When he undertakes to conclude that he is not elected, he acts presumptuously. His conclusion may be false for ought he knows. He pretends to know what he is ignorant of.

3. That God's striving with him by his spirit, is a hopeful sign that he is elected; for many times it is the fruit of election. When the spirit convinces of sin, it is in order to his convincing of righteousness, John xvi. 8. This is the course that God is wont to take with those that are elected. Frequently, he lets reprobates live in security: but he is wont to terrify the elect in

order to their conversion ; and the more earnestly the man follows after God, and labours to get into a converted condition, the more hopeful it is that God has elected him ; for where God has appointed the end, he has appointed the means also.

II. Another temptation is, that he has committed the unpardonable sin ; that he has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, that sin which is unto death. He has carried badly after illuminations, and it sinks into him, that now there is no remedy. In this case he may be told, that it has been a frequent thing for men to fear that they have committed this sin, who have afterward been converted ; that it is not the manner of those that have committed that sin, to be perplexed and exercised with fears about it ; but the principal way to help in this case, is to inform him from the word of God what this sin is. Particularly he may be informed,

1. That it is an external sin, not a sin that is committed in the heart. Men have some wicked thoughts after enlightenings, and then fear that they have been guilty of that sin ;

but that is an outward sin ; it is a sin that other men may see, 1 John v. 19.

2. That it is a course of sin, not any particular act of sin, which a man breaks off from, and is troubled for, but a way of evil, that he does continue impenitently in.

3. That it is one particular sort of sin, committed with great aggravations ; namely, a rejecting of the profession of the gospel. There be many other grievous sins, but none of them, however aggravated, are the unpardonable sin. It is a rejecting of the truth of the gospel, and renouncing the profession. Therefore they are said to fall away, Heb. vi. 6, they are said to forsake the assemblies of the people of God, Heb. x. 25, they are said to tread under foot the Son of God ; and to deny their baptism, Heb. x. 29. So that if any person among us should turn papist or heathen, having a blasphemous spirit against the ways of God, and a bloody persecuting spirit towards the people of God, there might be reason to fear that he was guilty of the unpardonable sin. But there be no footsteps in the scripture to judge that men, that are following after God,

and labouring to get into a converted condition, have committed that sin, though they are guilty of much unbelief, of many decays and backslidings, and of very vile thoughts and risings of heart; for multitudes of men, that have been guilty of such things, have had experience afterwards of the pardoning grace of God.

III. Another temptation is, that his day of grace is past. He had a time when he might have obtained mercy, but he has let it slip, and it is in vain for him to strive. In this case the minister may tell him,

1. That it is a common device of satan, when he cannot persuade men that it is too soon, then to persuade them that it is too late. He is set to hinder men from using of means; and first he tells them there is no haste; and when that temptation will do no longer, then he changes his voice, and tells them that the season is gone.

2. That there is no such sort of doctrine in the scripture, that any sort of men's day of grace is past, before the day of life is past, except they be guilty of the unpardonable sin. It is taught in the scripture, that God

will strive with some men only a limited time, and then destroy them, Gen. vi. 3. My spirit shall not always strive with man, yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years. It is also taught, that God does harden some nations in order to great misery, Isai, vi. 10, 11, and sometimes in order to their unchurching, John xii. 40. It is also taught, that God may harden some particular persons before death, and never more strive with them in any remarkable way, Rev. xxii. 11. Let him that is filthy, be filthy still. But there is no such thing taught, that there is any sort of men that may be described, or any particular person that may be known unto himself or others, whose day of grace can be said to be past, before his death. When men say their day is past, they only fear; they do not know it.

3. That such scriptures as seem to evidence that their day is past, do not determine any such thing. It is said, Prov. xxix. 1. that he that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed. But it is evident, that God waits longer upon some persons, than upon others.

Some threatenings are universal, and some are indefinite; showing what God does many times do; so it is said, Heb. x. 28, if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him; but the backsliding here spoken of, seems to be the unpardonable sin; he had been speaking of that, ver. 26, and seems here to have reference to the same sin; for in other cases God does speak encouragingly in his word to backsliders, Jer. iii. 22, Hosea xiv. 4.

IV. Besides the temptations mentioned, there is another sort of temptations that are very exercising to him. His conscience being guilty, he is much subject to frights.

1. One temptation is, that he shall be left to some great and dreadful sins. In this case he may be told by the minister,

(1.) That one special reason of these fears is, that he sees more of the badness of his heart than formerly. Men under troubles of conscience, are wont to see much of the corruption of their hearts, and they see that which is sufficient to lead them to all sorts of wickedness. Because God is angry with them, they are afraid he will not keep

them, but avenge himself on them, by leaving them to such wickedness.

(2.) That God is now striving with him in order to his eternal good. God is exercising a great deal of mercy, and he has no cause to conclude that God will so leave him. Though God might do it, yet he has reason to hope in God to preserve him.

(3.) That it is fit he should be humbled under a sense of the depravedness of his nature, and be sensible of the insufficiency of his own righteousness, to bring him into the favour of God. His heart being a sink of all manner of sin, he can never be justified but by the perfect righteousness of Christ. :

(4.) That his best way is to make haste to get into a converted condition. If he were once converted, he would not be in so much danger to fall into great transgressions; because he would have then a holy principle to resist temptations to sin; and then he would have an interest in the favour of God; and it would be more hopeful that God would preserve them.

2. Another temptation is, that he shall

get a false hope, and so satisfy himself that he is in a good estate, when he is far from it. He understands that it is so with many : Prov. xxx. 12. Rev. iii. 17. In this case the minister may tell him,

(1.) That he is indeed in danger of it, both because of the pride of his spirit, ready to magnify his own performances ; and because of his fears of hell. The tediousness of those fears make him ready to catch at any appearances of conversion,, and therefore he had need be exceeding careful. It is good for him to understand what conversion is, and what preparation there be in order thereto. And if there be appearances to him at any time as if he were converted, his way is to examine them thoroughly, and get the help of some that are skilful, before he settle himself much in that persuasion.

(2.) That he must leave himself, as to that matter, in the hands of God. It is beyond his own power to deliver himself. If God delight in him, he will carry him through all the difficulties of the work, and show him the right way. It may be God may have purposes of grace for him, and if so, he will show him the path of life.

8. Another temptation is, that satan will appear to him. This is a great terror to him ; especially he is possessed with this fear when he withdraws himself to secret prayers. Sometimes this makes him neglect his duty, sometimes it makes him attend it with distraction. In this case the minister may tell him,

(1.) That he is under God's keeping : and that when he is doing his duty, he is under God's protection. There is less reason to be afraid of satan's appearing at that time than at many other times. It is not God's manner to suffer satan to appear at such times.

(2.) That if satan had power and liberty to appear to him, it is not probable, that he would affright him with the expectations of it. He would not give such notice of his coming ; but his design in terrifying of him, is to prevent him from doing that which might be serviceable to his soul.

(3.) That it is too much honour to satan to be so far outbid with the temptation, as to change the time of his prayer. But if he cannot attend his duty suitably, and the

temptation do prove overbearing to him, it is better to attend the duty by day-light.

I may add to this case another that now and then happens, that he says he has heard some voice, seen some shape, felt something on him. This I apprehend at least sometimes to be only the effect of strong imagination. A strong fancy may make men to imagine such things ; as it is with persons in their dreams, and with distracted persons. All sensation is in the brain, and therefore by some disorder of that, men may think they see, feel, or hear things, which they do not see, feel, or hear. .

4. Another temptation is, that it is best to destroy himself. Many have been urged to this. Some have attempted it, and some have performed it, as Judas did. In this case the minister may tell him,

(1.) That the devil is very active in his temptation. Though he has that in his own heart, that may lead him to it, yet it is satan that stirs him up thereunto. The devil entered into Judas when he betrayed Christ, and was not gone out of him when he destroyed himself. The devil has a double

design in it. One is to secure the man. He is afraid he shall lose him, now he is troubled about his condition, and is taking pains for salvation. Satan is jealous lest he will escape out of his hands, and labours to make him destroy himself, that he may presently secure him. Then there will be no danger of his running away. The other design is, to bring reproach upon trouble of conscience, and discourage others from giving way to convictions. If there be but one such instance in a town, that will make many others to stifle conviction, lest they should come to the like end.

(2.) That there is good reason to hope that he may obtain salvation. It is discouragement that leads men to such practices ; and if he have but considerable hope of obtaining peace with God, there is not much danger of his hearkening to the temptation. Therefore such things may be suggested, as are proper to bear up his heart, as that the spirit of God is striving with him in order to his salvation ; that satan is afraid he will be saved ; that his sins are no other than what God has pardoned oftentimes, and the like.

(3.) That it is a dreadful sin to destroy himself. It is a sin against nature ; it is unthankfulness for God's mercy in saving his life ; that this is far worse than other sins that are very terrifying to him : this is the way to throw himself into endless misery. Whatever may be said of the possibility of the salvation of such persons, there is no reason to think, that one in a thousand is saved. This sin is heinous, and quickly cuts off their opportunities. Such a man as is tempted to this sin, would be afraid to tell a lie, or profane the sabbath. How much more has he reason to fear this sin, which will bring him presently to eternal damnation ! It is a poor remedy to deliver himself from anguish, to throw himself into that which is unspeakably greater ! Certain damnation is far more dreadful than the fears they are oppressed by. This will make their condition much worse, and not better.

Ninth.—Sometimes he complains of a self-righteous spirit. That he is ready to trust to every thing he does. That especially when he feels any affections, he is proud

of them, and ready to make a righteousness of them. In this case it may be profitable,

I. To convince him of the insufficiency of his own righteousness to save him. That his own righteousness will not bring him into favour with God, for his own righteousness is utterly imperfect, and so falls short of what the law requireth. The law stands for perfect obedience, but he never did perform one perfect act of obedience. All his obedience is stained with corruption. Besides, while he is in a natural condition, he does nothing sincerely, but is a hypocrite in all his performances ; and accordingly God is so far from justifying of him for the sake of them, that he will not accept of him, but holds him guilty for the sake of them. Besides, his own righteousness has not the nature of satisfaction in it ; there can be no satisfaction for sin, but by bearing the curse of the law. Obedience is a natural debt, and cannot satisfy for his contracted debts. If our obedience would have procured our acceptance, there would have been no need of the death of Christ. Christ's death would have been in vain, Gal. ii. 22.

II. To direct him how to get delivered from this self-righteous spirit, viz. by getting an understanding of the badness of his own heart. For let him hear ever so often of the vanity of his own righteousness, yet he will trust to it, till he sees he has none, and can get none. A thorough discovery of his own heart, will break him off from trusting in himself; for then he will see nothing in himself to trust in. He will be afraid because of his own duties. His strong holds will all be thrown down. But a notional conviction of the insufficiency of his own righteousness to save him, without an experimental conviction of the badness of his heart, will not deliver him from confidence in himself.

Tenth.—Sometimes he complains that he does every thing from a spirit of self love; he does not aim at the glory of God in any thing; but fear of hell, and desire of salvation, are the great things that do set him on work. Were it not for the fear of hell, he should leave off. In this case he may be told,

I. That it is impossible he should act

from a higher principle. He has no principle of love to God, John v. 42. Self-love is the reigning principle in him, and therefore it is no wonder, that he does all in religion from that spirit. It was his weakness, that he formerly thought he did any thing out of love to God. No natural man ever did act with a higher spirit, than a self-love. A bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit.

II. That he should make use of this for humiliation, and not for discouragement. There is no reason that he should be discouraged because of this, for every one is a hypocrite at first ; and many that have sought God for awhile with a selfish spirit, have afterward been turned, and have had another spirit given them. But he should make use of this to his humiliation, and learn hereby his own badness, the insufficiency of his own righteousness, and the justice of his condemnation ; and that he has no cause to think much that God does reject his services, and not give peace unto him.

Eleventh.—After this the sinner gives an

account that he finds a spirit of love to God, sorrow for sin, aiming at the glory of God, hating of sin, &c. In this case he may be told,

I. That there is a great resemblance between common and saving grace. Common grace is the picture of sanctifying grace, and common affections are sometimes stronger than saving. Pharaoh justifies God; Saul weeps; one who was far from sincerity, tells Christ, whithersoever he goeth, he will follow him; the Jews cry, Hosanna to the Son of David; the Israelites sang God's praise, but soon forgot his works.

II. That while they have such pangs of affection, it will be very hard for them to see their hypocrisy. Their fear of damnation makes them catch at any appearances of sincerity, and their pride makes them have a high opinion of their attainments. Men sometimes in that frame make such signs as do indeed show their hypocrisy to be arguments of their sincerity.

III. That it is a very dangerous thing for them to think that they are sincere, while they are not. Then they will bless

themselves, when God curses them. Then they will continue quietly in a natural condition, and neglect the means of conversion. And if they do not see the deceit quickly, there is danger that they may grow so hard-hearted, that if they do see it afterwards, they will not be the better for it.

IV. That they may be satisfied from such things as these, that they do not love God sincerely, whatever appearances there be, viz. that they never had a work of humiliation; and sincerity does never forego that; that they never closed with Jesus Christ, and the heart is never purified without faith. All those affections that go before faith, let them be ever so strong, are deceitful; the first good action that any man does perform, is to give entertainment to the Gospel; other things follow upon that.

Twelfth.—Sometimes he gives an account, that he does believe on Jesus Christ; he does not trust in his own righteousness, but places his hope in Christ. In this case the minister may tell him,

That there is a great deal of faith that does not justify. Some do believe for a time,

Luke viii. 13. Some receive the word with joy, and in time of temptation fall away, **Matt. xiii. 20, 21.** Some believed on Christ, but did not confess him, **John xii. 42.** Several sorts of faith do not justify. As,

I. An historical faith. Men do receive the history of the Gospel for a truth, and take it for granted, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and Saviour of the world ; and if any should deny it, or dispute against it, they would be very zealous against him. It would stir up their indignation, if they have any workings of infidelity ; yet generally they go with that persuasion, that the Gospel is true. But this is no more than a turk will say for his religion. This historical faith does not mortify men's corruptions, **John ii. 23, 24, 25.** Many profane men have this historical faith.

II. A considerable confidence that Christ will save them. They are persuaded that they shall obtain salvation by Christ, and do rejoice in the hope of it. This confidence is a distinct thing from justifying faith. It is good or bad according to the grounds of it. Godly men have frequently such a con-

fidence from the experience of a work of grace in their own hearts, and the manifestation of the love of God : but this is not justifying faith, but a faith of assurance. Carnal men may have such a confidence, arising from an imagination that God loves them, and from an opinion of their own goodness ; but this is not justifying faith, but presumption.

III. A dependency upon Christ, on the encouragement of a man's own goodness. He hears the gospel, or has some common illumination, discovering somewhat of God's readiness to pardon sinners through Christ. And considering what he is, he ventures on Christ. When a man savingly believes, he ventures upon Christ upon gospel-encouragements. But another ventures, being encouraged from the consideration of his prayers, tears, conscientiousness, or on that encouragement that he is not very bad ; so he thinks such a one as he may venture ; whereas, if he did see himself so bad as he indeed is, he would not venture on Christ. The man makes partly his own righteousness, and partly the righteousness of Christ,

the foundation of his faith. He does not exclude the righteousness of Christ, but the preponderating consideration, and that which especially emboldens him to venture, is his own righteousness. His own righteousness is the first foundation of his hope, though he takes in the plea also of the righteousness of Christ. He sees enough in Christ for such a one as himself, but not for the worst of sinners.

1. But possibly he will plead for himself, that he was much affected with Christ, and with the mercy of God. It was more than ordinary ; he never had such a light before. In this case he may be told, that carnal men have sometimes superficial discoveries of Christ, and are affected therewith, Matt. xiii. 20. Men have considerable enlightenings and tastes, yet may fall away ; and it is no wonder, they should be affected with the mercy of God. If men do apprehend that God has pardoned them ; they cannot but be affected with it. As pardon does affect men, so does imaginary pardon.

2. He may further plead for himself, that it was just so with him, as it has been with

godly men, as he has heard them to express themselves; that all his objections were answered. He was backward before, but he had such a discovery of Christ, that all his objections did vanish away, and he had nothing to say. But he may be told, that the reason why some men's objections are all answered, is not from the greatness of the light that God gave them, but from their ignorance of their own hearts. They did not see so much of their own badness, as thoroughly to feel the power of an objecting spirit. If they had seen how bad they were, their objections would not have been answered. A little matter will answer the objections of ignorant and conceited men. They have not light enough to make such strong objections, as they would do if they knew themselves: and so all their objections are easily answered.

3. Sometimes he builds his confidence upon some particular Scriptures.

(1.) One Scripture is, 1 John iii. 14. We know that we are passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He says he

finds such a spirit in himself, and he thinks his condition good. But he may be told,

I. There is a great difference between loving the people of God, for their piety, and honouring them for their piety. Many natural men have some convictions that godly men are choice men, and happy men ; and if they think a man is a sincere man, they honour him, and have a respect for him ; so Herod had for John, Mark vi. 20. But these men have not a sincere love to them for their piety. They do not love God nor godliness ; therefore do not love godly men for their piety.

II. There is a great difference between loving godly men for their piety, and loving them for their morality. Godly men are moral men. Some of them are eminent for justice, sobriety, and faithfulness, and these are very lovely things in the eyes of many natural men ; they love them upon that account. Dan. vi. 3, 18. Darius had a great love to Daniel, but it was not upon the account of his piety, but his prudence and morality. Morality is lovely in the eyes of many carnal men.

Some love godly men because they are related to them ; some, because they are friendly to them, and some because of their moral qualifications, that have not any love to them upon the account of their piety. The moral carriages of the people of God flow from a spirit of piety ; but morality and piety are very different things, and some persons that have a love to them upon the account of morality, may have no love to them upon the account of their piety.

(2.) Another Scripture that he may build confidence on, is, 1 John v. 11. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God. By this rule he says he is in a good condition. He does believe this, therefore he is regenerate. In this case he may be told,

That the believing here spoken of, is the receiving of it as certain upon the testimony of God. Many men have a common persuasion that Christ is the Son of God from tradition, and from his miracles, which is in a more general acceptation called believing, John ii. 23, and yet they are not born of God. But more properly they are said to believe it, who receive it upon

God's testimony ; and those men who have only a common persuasion, are indeed unbelievers ; they that have not grace, do not properly believe the word of God.

(3.) Another Scripture that he takes hold of to strengthen his confidence, is, Matt. v. 6. **Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. His conscience testifies that he does so ; therefore he hopes he is blessed. In this case he may be told,**

That though some desires of grace are grace, yet all desires of grace are not grace. As men may act hypocritically when they pretend to desire grace. For,

I. Many carnal men do desire grace. It is a common thing for ungodly men to desire grace ; especially when terrified with the word, they desire to be converted. Some men have slighter convictions, and they have faint and languishing desires ; and some have more smart terrors, and they have more earnest desires to be converted. They think they would give all they have in the world, that they were converted. So the foolish virgins, Matt. xxv. 8.

II. Desires of grace may arise from natural principles. Grace is not only desira-

ble for its own sake ; but there are several benefits that do attend it. which may make natural principles crave it. Grace is an honourable thing, Heb. xi. 2. It gains respect among men. It procures men a good name in the world. Hence pride makes men crave it. Grace is a means of many outward blessings, 1 Tim. iv. 8. And upon this account men of a selfish spirit may desire it. Grace is necessary in order to salvation. Heb. xii. 14. And upon this account nature makes men crave it.

Thirteenth. After he is delivered from his confident opinion of his good estate, and sees himself to be in a natural condition still, it may be needful upon that occasion,

I. To encourage him. For he is in danger to be too much cast down, so as to hinder his future diligence. He may be encouraged from the consideration of God's goodness, in discovering that deceit, which would have proved his bane. He was in a dangerous way, but God has delivered him, and so put him in a nearer capacity to be converted. God's not suffering him to continue in his delusion, is a hopeful sign,

that God does intend mercy to him. He is now under greater advantages than before. John ix. 41.

II. To warn him that he does not run into the same error again : for he is still under the reigning power of a self-righteous spirit, and may get a false opinion of conversion again. Some do several times strike upon that rock. Therefore he must be cautioned not to be deceived with the appearances of grace ; not to give way to the flattery of his own heart. If he should take up such a persuasion again, it is doubtful that he would not be delivered, for relapses are dangerous ; and if he should begin to think so, it were best to advise with those that can inform him, before he be confirmed in such an opinion.

III. To lead him into the understanding of his own badness, and insufficiency to help himself. This is an advantageous time to drive him out of himself, and bring on the work of conversion. When he sees his own hypocrisy, the best way is to follow, until he is quite emptied of himself. It is good policy to improve a victory, and

to help him to a thorough sight of himself, that he may be prepared for Christ. Sometimes after a man has been seeking awhile, and has passed through many changes, there is reason to fear he will leave off. He has a great deal of discouragement. Others obtain, and he is left. God does not make the word powerful on his heart ; he does not get forward, and it may be perceived, that he is more slighly than he was. In this case it is best,

1. To encourage him. For the discouragements that he is under, are a great cause of apostacy ; therefore it is best to hearten him up. The notion of the giant-like stature of the Canaanites, and the strength of their walls, was a great inducement to Israel to entertain thoughts of returning back to Egypt. So it is in this case. And he may be encouraged two ways :

(1.) By showing him the possibility of his obtaining mercy. So Cabel told the people they were well able to overcome, and if God delighted in them, he would bring them in. Thus he may be encouraged by showing of him that God can help him ;

and that nothing does appear to show that God will not help him. His mercy is free : he has pardoned others as bad as he. His providences to him are consistent with designs of grace.

(2) By showing him the wonderful benefit that he will have if he does obtain mercy. Besides that peace and communion with God which he will have in this life, he will enjoy eternal salvation in the other world, which is inconceivably great. It were a great thing to have his punishments moderated ; much more to be delivered from them. It were a great thing to be saved out of hell after hundreds of years ; greater to be preserved from coming there. It were a great thing to be kept out of hell, and suffered to live a natural life always upon the earth ; greater to be translated into the glorious presence of God, and to be like the angels of God, always beholding the face of the Father. It is worth the while to go through any difficulty for heaven. Heaven will make amends for all. If all the way to heaven were rocks and mountains, yet it is worth the while to travel

thither. The people of Israel were often told of the excellency of the land of Canaan ; that it was a land flowing with milk and honey, and a land of vine-yards and olive-yards, and wheat and barley. So it is useful to set before him the glorious happiness that the people of God will enjoy in another world.

2. To warn him of his danger ; for security has a great hand in apostacy : to remember him what a miserable condition he would cast himself into, if he should cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God. Sometimes when men apostatize, they fall into despair, and God suffers them to be miserably hurried and haunted by their own evil conscience, and no means can deliver them : so it was with Judas. Sometimes shortens their days, and does not suffer them to continue in this world. When they draw back, God withdraws protection from them, and they quickly die. When they neglect seeking eternal life, God denies temporal life to them, and sometimes he leaves them to be very wicked. They sometimes become of the number of the

basest of men, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21, 22; Matt. xii. 44, 45, and they are in dreadful danger of eternal fire, and that misery that no creature knows how to grapple with. Such considerations as these may help him against the sloth and slightness of his spirit.

Fourteenth. Sometimes he complains he is followed with atheistical thoughts. He is frequently followed with questions about the being of a God. On this case the minister may,

I. Acquaint him, that though this is a great sin, yet it may be forgiven. There is abundance of atheism in the hearts of men. The lives of men show that they have much of this spirit. Tit. i. 16. And many persons that have complained of this, have been afterwards converted. And some godly men are much exercised with this temptation. Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13. And therefore, though he should not make light of it, yet he should not draw up any dark conclusions against the possibility of his salvation.

II. Convince him that there is a God; and settle his heart about that great truth,

1. By evidencing to him the being of a God. This he may do especially from the works of creation, thus : the things which we see are made things ; they are finite, compounded, corruptible ; and therefore it is impossible it should be of themselves : that which is finite is not eternal, but was made in time, out of nothing : that which is compounded, was compounded by some other thing : that which is corruptible has not its being from itself. We could not be of ourselves, and therefore the first man, who was of the same nature with us, could not be of himself ; and he that made these things must be an infinitely glorious God. He that could bring the world out of nothing, and make the creatures that are therein, with wonderful variety of properties and virtues, must be one of infinite perfection ; that is, God. Rom. i. 20. Psalm xix. 1.

2. By removing those objections that prove snares to him. If that be a snare to him, that we do not see God ; he may be told that we do not question many other things which we never saw. We doubt not

that there are such countries as France and Spain. Several things are invisible, as the souls of men, angels, and devils, unless they assume a shape ; yet we may be satisfied about these. There be other ways to satisfy us about the existence of things, besides seeing of them. We know some things by reason, and some things by faith, Heb. xi. 3. If that be a temptation to him, that others do not believe the being of God, for he can plainly perceive by the lives of men, that whatever they pretend, they do not really think there is a God : he may be told, that though they are not fully persuaded that there is a God yet they cannot be fully persuaded there is not a God ; that they have so much light that they cannot extinguish it ; that there is not a perfect atheist in the world. Besides carnal men are led by their corruptions, and their reason is very much darkened, and there is no weight to be laid upon their thoughts. Shall we think there be no antipodes, because some ignorant men have denied it ? Shall we question the roundness of the earth, because some think otherwise ?

We may not offer violence to our reason, because of the sottishness of other men. If that be a snare to him, to conceive how God can be of himself; how it is possible he should be, without being made: he may be told, that if that be above his reason to fathom, yet that is not so contrary to reason as it is to think that a company of finite beings should be of themselves. Besides, if there are beings, there must of necessity be some first being. If the rest be made, yet there must be one that was not made. To say that nothing was made, and to say that all things are made, are alike absurd. Those things that are made, could not have been, unless there was something that was not made. Seeing many things have a being, there must be one being that is of himself. They could not interchangeably make one another; but there is one who was not made, but is of himself, who is God.

Fifteenth. Sometimes he complains that he is followed with horrible injections, blasphemous, and other wicked thoughts, that are a great affliction to him, and take away the comfort of his life. They make him a

terror to himself. In this case he may be told,

I. That so far as they are injected by satan, they are not imputed to him. The heart of man is very bad, and from that fountain of sin, exceeding wicked thoughts may arise. But when persons are violently followed with such thoughts, they are usually injected by satan ; they are some of his fiery darts spoken of, Eph. vi. 16. And when he casts them in, the man is no more guilty, than he that hears a man blaspheme. If a man were perfectly holy, that could not prevent such injections, if God let satan loose upon him.

II. That his nature is so corrupted, that those injections do less or more taint him. The heart is like tinder, and these temptations will make some impression. Though he has a detestation of those thoughts, and labours against them, yet there is a principle in the heart to fall in with them. Generally, upon such occasions, persons do contract guilt, for it is but rare, if ever, that men are merely passive at such a time. The sin that is in men, does easily beset

hem, Heb. xii. 1. And therefore it becomes him to be confessing before God, the wretchedness of his own heart, in soldering in any degree with those temptations.

III. That such temptations are no sign that God does not love him. He may not gather from thence, that God has given him up to satan ; for this has been the condition of some very godly men. This is an exercise that God has brought upon some that have been dear to him. As satan is wont to tempt the best of men, so some of the choicest, with these suggestions. This is not too great an affliction to be brought upon such men as God does love. The devil may in this manner hurry those that he shall not be able to destroy. Paul in likelihood had some such temptations, 2 Cor. xii. 7. God for holy ends may suffer those whom he loves to be thus exercised, that they may learn their own weakness, and be humbled before God.

IV. That it is very usual for God to suffer men to be long followed with these injections. Though there be some instances to the contrary, yet more ordinarily, after a

while, God does restrain satan. Though no man can determine any precise time, yet after a while they are wont to be removed. God may so far hear prayers, as to remove this affliction.

Sixteenth.—Sometimes he complains bitterly of the badness of his own heart; speaks of it as exceeding bad. He says he never saw it so bad as of late, and seems to be almost discouraged thereby. In this case he may be told,

I. That the heart of every rational man is exceeding bad. Many times, through restraints of corruption and common grace, the badness of it is hidden; but the heart of every natural man is desperately wicked, Jer. xvii. 9. Whatever appearances it may make, it is utterly corrupt. Every sin is unmortified, even those sins that they have not been accustomed to; those sins that their tempers do not dispose them to; those sins of whose baseness they have the deepest sense; and their hearts are totally empty of all goodness. There is not one spark of goodness in them. That the principle of sin is as strong in them after they are enlightened and reformed, as ever it was.

II. That it is necessary for him to be convinced of the badness of his own heart. When men see the badness of their own hearts, they are ready to be discouraged ; but they are then in a more hopeful condition than before. If men be strangers to their own hearts, they will trust in themselves and neglect Christ. God first discovers to them what they are, and then he discovers the excellency of Christ to them. Men will never come to Christ until they are convinced what corrupt, blind, and dead creatures they be. And therefore the more God shows him of the badness of his heart, the more graciously he deals with him. The badness of the heart is matter of sorrow, but the sight of that badness is matter of encouragement. The more they see of that, the more hope there is of their being prepared for Christ.

III. That it is his best way to search his own heart further. Many times men will complain bitterly of the badness of their own hearts, and one time after another give an account that they have seen more in their hearts than ever they did before ; and yet

are far from seeing what they must see in their own hearts. And while it is thus, they should be put upon it to study their own hearts, that they may see more of them. Persons are afraid to see their own hearts, and are wont to strive against it, seeking to persuade themselves, that they are better than indeed they be. It crosses their pride, and their false hopes, to see the badness of their own hearts ; therefore there is need to stir them up thereunto, and to tell them of what consequence it is. The sight of the heart is like the opening of a festered wound, it prepares men for healing ; they should be put upon it to search themselves, and led into the way to do it. Particular things may be propounded to them to search after. This is a very material thing ; for the sincerity of their conversion, has a great dependence upon the thorough knowledge of their hearts.

Question. Whether at this time it is not best to urge him to believe on Christ, though he does not thoroughly understand the badness of his own heart ?

Answer 1. It may not be amiss, while

he is in this condition, to mind him that it is his duty to believe in Christ; and to set forth sometimes the excellency and sufficiency of Christ before him. It may be several ways beneficial to him. It may help him to take notice of the contrariety and opposition of his heart to this duty, and lead him into a further understanding of the corruption of his nature. It may give some check to that spirit of self-righteousness that prevails in him, and make him sensible of the necessity of the righteousness of Christ unto his justification. It may serve to encourage as to the possibility of his salvation, and convince him, that he is capable to be brought into a state of salvation.

2. Yet there is no ground to hope, that until he thoroughly sees himself, he will accept the offer of the gospel. Men must first be humbled before they will believe. Invitations to come to Christ will never be successful, until men are driven out from their false refuges. They may hear the most powerful arguments with a great deal of evidence and affliction, but they will not

be obedient. Either they will be afraid to come to Christ, and have one thing or other to object; they will be fearful, because they see so much sin, or because they do not know that God means them, or they have not the inward call of the gospel; under some notion or other they will not come, or else they will come in a presumptuous manner, and pretend to believe, when they do not believe. Either they will be borne down with unbelief, or they will get a false faith.

Seventeenth. Sometimes the man complains that he has not encouraging Scriptures come to him, and therefore he fears that he is not under the work of the Spirit. Other men have encouraging Scriptures brought to them; and therefore God does not deal with him as with those he is wont to convert. In this case the minister may tell him,

I. That if he have supporting considerations cast into his heart, this is sufficient. There is no necessity to have encouraging Scriptures to come with a great deal of power upon his heart. There is need of

some supporting considerations to maintain a hope, and to keep him from despair. And if the heart be but supported with a hope that he may obtain at last, that is sufficient. God deals very variously with men. Some that have many encouraging Scriptures, do never obtain mercy.

II. That if he does continue to wait upon God, he may have encouraging Scriptures come to him after awhile. God knows what he stands in need of, and does not tie up himself to the same method, as to the circumstances of the work. He uses a great deal of variety. Scarce two persons are carried on exactly after the same manner. Some have more encouragement towards the beginning, and others towards the latter end of the work.

Eighteenth. Sometimes he says, that if he were sure to obtain, he could be willing to take any pains : yea, though God should hold him waiting a long while ; and he could be content to go through any anguish of spirit : but that which sinks his heart and makes him dull, is, that he is not certain of

success. In this case he may be told by the minister,

I. That all that have obtained mercy, have sought upon the encouragement that they might obtain mercy. They did not know what the issue of it would be. The possibility of it, was that which bore up their hearts in using of means. They had some hope mingled with fear; and if they had not sought upon the encouragement of the possibility, they had certainly gone without mercy. The sick man does not say he will not use means, unless he were certain of a cure. The merchant does not say, that he will not send his ship to sea, unless he were certain of a prosperous voyage. The husbandman does not say, that he will not plough and sow his land, unless he were certain of a good crop. Men must wait upon God, upon this encouragement, that they may obtain mercy. John ii. 8, 9.

II. That the mere loss of their pains is a small matter. It will be a dreadful thing for a man to lose his soul; but the mere loss of their labour is a small matter. A

man may well venture the loss of his labour, in hope of the salvation of his soul.

A man that is sick, will venture the loss of a little expense for the preservation of his life. Men have no cause to be very scrupulous about the loss of their pains. The loss of their souls will be far sorer.

III. It is not fit that men should be sure to obtain mercy, until they do believe in Christ. There is security enough, that if they do believe in Christ, they shall be saved. And there is no reason that God should be desired to make a new covenant, and secure salvation on any other condition. God has descended low enough when he promises salvation to believing; and it is too much for any man to desire that God should promise it to reading, or praying, or reforming, &c. Especially seeing those things are done with a false heart, only for salvation.

IV. If men be thoroughly scared with the danger of damnation, they will readily improve their possibility, and not stand for assurance of success. Men will be glad of

a possibility, and not neglect means, because they have no more encouragement. If a man be cast into the sea, he will not neglect swimming, because he is not certain that he can swim to the shore. If a man be pursued by an enemy, he will not stand still, because he is not certain that he shall get clear. If men stand convinced of their dreadful danger, in neglecting to seek, they will betake themselves to the use of means at a venture, rather than run the hazard of their souls.

Nineteenth. Sometimes he complains, that after he has told the minister how it is with him, it seems to him as if he had told a multitude of lies ; and he is terrified with the apprehension of it. In this case he may be told,

I. That these things arise partly from the frightfulness of his conscience. He is in a terrified condition, and so the sound of a shaking leaf will scare him ; and he flees when none pursueth. He imagines dangers when there be none. He has a trembling guilty conscience, and is afraid that he sins when he does not, and is ready

to charge things upon himself without cause.

II. That these thoughts arise from those contrary workings that are in his own heart. Sometimes he has a great sense of danger; sometimes he has but little sense of it. Sometimes he is afraid he has committed the unpardonable sin, and then he is not afraid of it. He has great variety and change of frames, and whatever account he gives of the workings of his heart, he has had some contrary workings thereunto; so that after he has told what workings of heart he had, he has some reflections, because he remembers some contrary workings of heart.

Twentieth. Sometimes a man that has been seeking after peace with God, a great while, leaves off for some months together. He is followed with guilt, and comes and makes his case known to the minister. In this case it is very suitable,

I. To reprove him for his backsliding, and set before him the sinfulness of what he has done, and the danger that he has exposed himself unto. He has quenched

the Spirit, the tendency of whose emotions was for his good." He has sinned against a great deal of light. When he was in a more hopeful way, he has relapsed into a sorrowful condition. He has lost ground, and has a great deal of his work to do over again. God must needs be greatly provoked with him.

II. To encourage him notwithstanding, by assuring him, that he is capable of mercy. God invites backsliders to return to him. Persons are sometimes cured of relapses. God has mercy enough to pardon such sins. Several persons have had experience of it. Sometimes the first attempt is not successful, as when David attempted to bring the ark into the place prepared for it, but the next time he prospered.

III. To warn them that they do not so again. They are in great danger because they have done so already. A beast that has once tired, is more ready to do so again. Those temptations that have prevailed upon them, are more like to prevail again; and if they get a habit of backsliding, they

will be more incurable. Custom in an evil way naturalizes it to men. They run more readily into the same.

Twenty-first. Sometimes a man goes on in a way of seeking a great while, yet seems to be at a stand, the work does not go forward. He has the same fears, the same complaints, sees nothing further into his own heart. He is like a man in a chronic disease, that notwithstanding all medicines, continues much in the same posture, he is neither much better, nor much worse; like a ship that beats upon the coast day by day, and cannot get in. In this case the minister may,

I. Mind him that he may quickly die. The sense of approaching death is very terrifying, and will stir men up to do their utmost. The face of death is terrible, and it may be very profitable to work upon them a sense that they may be quickly snatched away; they have the seeds of all diseases in them; God's judgments are as a light that goeth forth. Men are commonly snatched away before they are aware. Many of the Israelites that went out of

Egypt, did not live to go into Canaan. Their way is offensive to God, and so he may take them away in his anger.

2. To convince them that they cannot make their own hearts better. One thing that makes men be at a stand is, that they are waiting in expectation to mend their own hearts. They hope from sabbath to sabbath, and from one duty to another. And though they fail hitherto of their expectation, they find that afflictions do not do it, nor ordinances, nor mercies, nor examples ; yet they are promising themselves, that, after a while, they shall make them better. It is fit they should be convinced of the impossibility of that. Their hoping and waiting for that is their snare. They may be showed how it is quite beyond their power. Whatever resolutions they take up, whatever pains they take, whatever encouragements, afflictions, and terrors they have, yet it is beyond the compass of their power. They cannot understand the excellency of God and Christ, or the great evil of sin. Sin governs them, and they cannot subdue it. Self-love may make them seek salva-

tion, but not love God above themselves. Men cannot be scared out of a sinful estate, though they may out of some sinful practices.

3. To possess them that God is very angry with them, notwithstanding the pains they take. For one great reason why they make no more proficiency is, because they live upon their duties. Though they do not think that their duties do justify them, yet they do pacify their consciences with them ; and they think that God will have a respect to the pains they take. They do what they can, and they do no more than some others ; and they hope they stand upon better terms with God than formerly. And, though they speak of their own badness, yet they imagine so much of their goodness, as that they think it will be a hard case for God to damn them. Therefore they should be convinced upon what terms they stand with God ; that as there is no merit in their duties, so there is nothing to move God to pity them, nor to abate the anger of God towards them. But their best duties are provocations, and imputed to them as sin.

Twenty-second.—Sometimes a man that has been in a very hopeful way quickly to get through the work of conversion, returns again to his old postures. He had of late great convictions of the badness of his own heart, the hypocrisy of his duties, the insufficiency of any thing of his own to gain God's favour; and has such workings of heart as are wont immediately to procure submission to God, and a work of humiliation; and in a little time tacks about, and is remote from humiliation as he used to be: as the children of Israel when they were almost ready to enter into Canaan, fetched a compass, and wandered a long time in the wilderness. In this case the minister may,

I. Warn him that he be not afraid to see the badness of his own heart. For persons that have been praying for it, are yet afraid of it when it comes to them. It is such a doleful and uncomfortable spectacle that they cannot bear to behold it. The sense of it is so cross to their pride, and stirs up such fears of damnation, that they cannot tell how to away with it, and labour to hide it

from themselves, and to get such affections as may comfort them. But they should be told, that there is no cause for them to fear to see their own hearts, for it is dangerous to be ignorant of them, but not dangerous to see them. The sight of the heart is awful, but not hurtful. The heart is bad whether they see it or not, and they must see it before it be better. The chirurgion must come to the bottom of the wound before he heals it.

II. Instruct him, that there is a necessity of his submission to God ; for his opposition to that has made him to quench those convictions of the Spirit which he had. He could not bear to yield himself a prisoner into the hands of God, and to lie at his foot waiting for mercy, and that he has put him upon it to deliver himself from those convictions that led him away. But he must be instructed that there is a necessity of submitting himself to God. He cannot help himself, and God is not bound to help him. God may leave him to perish if he will, and so long as he magnifies himself, and refuses to resign up himself to God, God will not

discover Christ to him. He may pray, but he will not be heard. God resists the proud.

Twenty-third.—Sometimes he is afraid that his convictions are not like the convictions of other men ; and he hath several arguments to strengthen those fears.

One argument is, that his convictions are only the workings of natural conscience, and not from the Spirit of God ; his convictions are the workings of his own thoughts. But he may be told, the way of the Spirit's working when it does convince men, is by enlightening natural conscience. The Spirit does not work by giving a testimony, but by assisting natural conscience to do its work. Natural conscience is the instrument in the hands of God to accuse, condemn, terrify, and to urge to duty. The Spirit of God leads men into the consideration of their danger, and makes them to be affected therewith, Prov. xx. 27. The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly. When men's own hearts are stirring them to sin, and they have many reasonings about it, that is no

sign that satan is not busy with them. So when their own hearts are accusing and frightening them, it is no sign that the Spirit of God is not at work with them. All the regular acts of conscience, all those convictions that are according to the word of God, are from the Spirit of God.

Another argument is, that his terrors are not so great as other men's. Many others have such terrors that they are swallowed up therewith, almost distracted, and the town may take notice of it. But his terrors are more moderate by far. But he may be told,

That there is great diversity in the degrees of men's trouble. Every man must have so much trouble, as to make him strive earnestly after salvation, and do what he can do in order to it ; so much as to make him thoroughly reform, and earnestly to strive to get into a converted condition. Every ship that performs its voyage, must have so much wind as may make the ship sail ; but some ships have stronger and more tempestuous winds than others have. Some men are of a more tender spirit, and less

will prevail upon them than upon others. And some men whose troubles are but small at the beginning, do grow afterwards to a great height. God uses his sovereignty very much as to the degree of men's trouble.

Another argument is, that his terrors did not begin as other men's did. Many others have been smitten in the preaching of the word; the word of God has been like a sharp sword in their heart; but his troubles came from the examples of others, or from some affliction, or from his fall into some sin. But he may be told,

'That it is all one from what occasion his troubles did arise, provided that he be but convinced of the absolute necessity of present reconciliation, and be but earnest in his endeavours after that. Though the word be a principal means of conversion, yet God may bless what means he will to do the work, Luke iii. 10. 12. 14. Jer. ii. 24. Examples, falls, and afflictions, have a great tendency this way. Whatever be the means of men's reformation, yet if men be reformed, it is well. God would have men make use of providences as well as ordinances.

There is a voice of God in them, Mic. vi. 9.

Another argument is, that he does not see the evil of sin. He sees a great deal of danger, but he does not see the evil of sin; he thinks that other men see more than he sees. But he may be told,

That other men do not see the great evil of sin, until they are converted. Men have not a spiritual understanding given to them, until they are converted. So long as they remain under the preparatory work of the spirit, no such things can be expected from them, as are peculiar to saints. When once men come to see the evil of sin, they also see the glory of God. They do mortify their sins, and are brought into a state of sanctification.

Another argument is, because he does not prosper in his seekings. He has been seeking a long time, and yet God stands at a distance from him. Other men get through quickly. Some that began a long time since him, have obtained peace with God, but he is left yet in a deplorable condition. But he may be told,

That it is a common thing with God, to

convert some in a far shorter time than others. One ship may spend twice as much time in performing the same voyage, as another. One man's disease may be broke in far less time than another man's. Some men have more temptations and hinderances than others. The Spirit pursues some men more closely than others; and those that are longer under the work, may be as soundly converted at last. The great reason why men do not prosper in their seekings, is not that their first troubles were not like the troubles of other men, but because they trust in their own righteousness, and are not yet convinced of their own helpless condition, and the badness of their hearts.

Question.—But are not some men's convictions and terrors, saving? Is there not a difference all along in the terrors of them that are elect, and them that are reprobate?

Answer.—There is no difference for a great while, between the strivings of the Spirit in those that shall be converted, and in those that shall not. As there may be no difference in the voyages of two ships, for a pretty while, one of which at last arrives

in the harbour, and the other is cast away ; so it is here. Those that shall never be converted, may have the same experiences for a considerable time, that those have that shall be converted. There may be no difference in their awakenings, in their reformations, in their temptations, in their encouragements, nor in respect of their frames. This does appear,

1. Because those strivings that men may have, that shall never be converted, are sufficient to bring men forward towards Christ. There is no necessity at all, that the elect should have any other strivings for a time, than what are common to reprobates. The convictions that reprobates may have, are sufficient to bring men forward towards Christ. Those terrors that reprobates may have are sufficient to wean them from the world, to make them reform their lives, and labour to be converted. If men have but such a sense of hell, as many reprobates have had, there is no danger but they will take pains to be saved, Ps. lxxviii. 34. Though this will not convert them, yet it will bring them nearer to the kingdom of

God than they were. It will make them travel towards Christ, and overcome several impediments that lay in the way of their conversion. Though they do not see the great evil of sin, yet they will be afraid of it. Though they do not see the excellency of holiness, yet they will seek after it. Common convictions are a preparation for conversion.

2. They that are to be converted, are not capable of any strivings of the Spirt, but what are common, until they come to be humbled, and to believe. It is a pretty while, after God begins to strive with the elect, before they come to be humbled, and to believe in Christ ; and before that, they are not capable of any strivings, but what are common. What can there be, but what is common to other men ? Other men have fears of hell and judgment, sense of wrath, moral convictions of the evil of sin, encouragements, many discoveries of vileness in their own hearts, and deceitfulness. And what can these have more, before they are humbled ? They are not capable yet to see the evil of sin, the excellency of Christ, nor

of godly sorrow, nor of sincere desires, because they are not converted. Why may not a reprobate have as much conviction as they? What are they capable of in their present circumstances, but what many have had, that are now in hell? Some speak of a saving conviction and contrition. What is it? If it be only of hell, and wrath, reprobates have such as well as they. It cannot be the great evil of sin, for none can see that, but they that are converted. Natural men are blind, Rev. iii. 17.

3. If there be a difference, men might be able to tell what the difference is, and apply it. There is a difference between common grace and saving grace, and we are able to give an account what it is. So if there were a difference between the convictions of the elect and reprobate, we might be able, from the word of God, to tell what the difference is. If ordinary men could not do it, yet it might be expected, that such as have a deeper insight into the Scriptures should. There God gives us rules to discern the difference that is in his dispensations. But no man in the world is able to tell what convictions

of wrath and hell are peculiar to elect sinners, and what are peculiar to reprobates. Can we distinguish them by their kinds, by their degrees, by their continuance, by their immediate effects? What rules have we to guide us in this matter? And can we make an application to persons? If sinners give us a true account of their terrors, can we tell one that his convictions are such as are proper for the elect, and they will end in conversion; and another, that his convictions are the convictions of reprobates, and that they will end in damnation? This would be a bold undertaking of any man. The Scriptures are silent about it; yea, the Scriptures speak the contrary, Luke xii. 52. Them that were entering in ye hindered.

Twenty-fourth. Sometimes the man is afraid he shall die quickly, and lives in a great deal of torment upon that account. He is in anguish of spirit. This frame rises, either merely from his sense of God's anger, he thinks God will presently pour out his wrath; or sometimes besides this, there is something in providence that looks so, or some word comes to him, that makes him

fear it ; as that, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live. In this case he should be told by the minister,

1. That he ought not to take up such a conclusion. No man should believe any thing that may be false. He has no sufficient grounds to draw up any such peremptory conclusion, for the thing itself is uncertain. God's anger does not show it. God has been angry with him a long time, yet he lives. Neither do these other signs show that it shall be ; such things have oftentimes failed.

2. That it is not so usual with God, to take men away when they are under earnest endeavours to be converted. God threatens sinners, to take them away in time of their security, when they say, peace, peace. 1 Thes. v. 3. Matt. xxiv. 48. Though sometimes men die, that are seeking after peace with God, and to all appearance have not found, yet this is not an ordinary dispensation. When he is striving by his Spirit to bring them to repentance, it is a hopeful sign that God will wait a while upon them. If we knock at the man's door,

and they be all fast, and do not stir to open the door, we are wont to go away ; but if we see that they are rising and preparing to open the door, we are content to wait awhile. God generally stays to see what work men will make of it.

III. That he has indeed no certainty of his life ; his body is mortal and frail, and many men die suddenly. God has been much provoked by him, and may justly snatch him away by a sudden stroke. Many times men have very little warning of death. The fear of death is of great use to forward the work of conversion. If men put far away the evil day, they thereby harden their hearts. The right numbering of their days, is a means to make them apply their hearts to wisdom. Ps. xc. 12. Upon this account it is good to nourish awful fears of death. That makes men sensible of the vanity of the world, of the dangerousness of sin, of the necessity of making haste to be converted. Therefore ministers should say nothing to persuade them, that they are in no danger, for they are in real danger ; and it is best for them to have the sense of

it. This will solemnize their spirits, and quicken them to their work. When afraid of death, they will be willing to take pains, and not be hindered by temptations.

Twenty-fifth. Sometimes he complains, that he finds a dreadful murmuring spirit ; he is dreadful apt to quarrel with God, and cannot tell how to justify him. It is a great terror to him, yet he cannot deliver himself from it. In this case he may be told,

I. That it is generally so with men under the work of preparation. There is scarce any but has experience of it. Men can hardly bear outward afflictions, much less appearance of damnation. When awakened sinners are called upon to submit to God, yield themselves prisoners to him, there are two courses men take to avoid it. One is, to establish a righteousness of their own. They strive to pacify the anger of God. They would fain do something to engage the heart of God to save them. Upon that account they pray affectionately, they are exact in their outward carriage, they strive to make their hearts better. The other

way is, when they find that their danger continues, after all their pains, they quarrel with God, object against his dispensations, find fault with him. They are in a tumult, their hearts in an uproar, and they are murmuring against God's dealing.

II. That he may see much of his own heart in these murmurings. And indeed, these murmurings are a great occasion sometimes, to bring men off from their own righteousness. Therefore it is good to lead him on this occasion, into the sense of the wretchedness of his own heart. He may see in these workings, much of his own hypocrisy. He has owned many times, the need he has of free mercy; and that he deserved condemnation; yet now he murmurs, as if God owed salvation to him. He may see much of the pride of his own heart, in rising up against God, and of his boldness, and of his enmity to God. These workings of heart, discover a dreadful fountain of sin within.

III. That those objections, which his heart makes against God's proceeding, are causeless. He may be showed particular-

ly, that the ways of God are righteous, and that men have no reason to murmur against him. It should be cleared up to him, that God has great cause to find fault with him, but he has no cause to find fault with God.

1. If the man objects, that men are brought under the necessity of sinning, and yet are punished for sin ; sin being decreed, it cannot but be committed, yet it is punished. He may be told,

(1.) That the decree of God does not at all infringe the liberty of man. Though the decree brings a necessity, yet men act as freely as if there were no decrees. The decree of God offers no violence to the will of man. Men choose the ways of sin. Isai. lxvi. 3. And therefore the decree is no excuse for sin. Men do not accept it when any wrong is done unto them, neither will God accept it as an excuse. Men act their own pleasure when they sin. The necessity arising from the decree, does not take away the commendableness of good actions, nor the blameableness of bad actions. This necessity does not cut off all rewards and punishments.

(2.) That in this decree, God does but use his sovereign liberty. If God will make a multitude of men and angels, must he be bound to bring them all to eternal life? Who shall lay a prohibition upon God, that he shall not make use of some of them, for the glory of his justice? If it be injurious for God to decree that men shall sin, and then punish them for their sin, then he is utterly cut off from all opportunity for the glorifying of his justice. But it is worth the while, for men and angels to suffer, for the manifestation of God's vindictive justice.

2. If the man objects that the sin of Adam is imputed to him, and upon that account, he is deprived of original holiness; whereas he was not at all active in it, and gave no consent unto it—He might be told,

(1.) That men in many cases, have a power to appoint others to represent them; and they are accordingly bound to stand or fall, according to the carriage of representatives; for others. These things are common in matters of a civil nature. Why then may not God, who hath more power over men

than they have over themselves, appoint one to represent them, to act on their behalf, according to whose carriage they should stand or fall?

(2.) That it was a fair and probable way, for the good of mankind. It was as hopeful a way, as for every man to stand for himself. There was less likelihood that all Adam's posterity should stand, than that he should stand, not only from the personal qualifications of Adam, which were certainly greater than his posterity would have had in the time of their childhood: but because Adam was under an exceeding great bond. He had a great charge upon him; the happiness of all his posterity having a great dependence upon his carriage. Adam had not only the care of his own soul upon him, but he stood intrusted for many millions that were to descend from him. And it was probable, that that consideration should make him more careful to keep God's covenant.

3. If the man objects, against the severity of God's law, that punishes men with everlasting damnation; he may be told;

(1.) That it is very meet that he should appoint such a punishment, as might be a great restraint to man's sinning. If God had appointed some little punishment, men would have been more hold to break the law of God. Experience shows, that this severe punishment is not sufficient to keep multitudes from living in a way of sin. If the punishment had been less, men would have regarded it but very little.

(2.) It was very meet that God should appoint a punishment that was suitable for the vindication of his name. God loves himself, and his name is dear to him; and it becomes God to annex such a penalty to his law, as that his great name might be vindicated. God is a great God, and therefore sin is a great evil; and it is very fit, that if sin be punished, there be a punishment appointed some way proportionable to the great evil of sin..

(3.) That by God's appointing so dreadful a punishment, he makes no man miserable. God holds out the point of a sword. This will do them no hurt, if they do not run against it. God makes a dreadful pit.

This will hurt no man, if he does not run into it. God's laws make no man miserable ; they make themselves miserable, and are cruel to their own souls, when they sin against him.

(4.) The punishment appointed for sin, is no greater than the recompense of obedience. There is an equality in the law. The law is as bountiful to the obedient, as severe to the disobedient. If the law did appoint little rewards of obedience, and great punishments of disobedience, men would have more show for their complaints. Heaven is as good, as hell is bad.

4. If he objects, that God has showed mercy to others, that have not taken so much pains as he ; God pardons others, and gives grace to others, but denies him : He may be told,

(1.) That his labour and service does lay no bond on God to show mercy to him. Whatever he has pretended in his prayers, he has no true regard to the glory of God ; he has minded nothing higher than his own salvation ; he has been serving himself, and not God. God is no ways obliged to give

him such a reward. He has not merited grace, but has merited condemnation by such services. There is nothing in such services to work upon the mercy of God. God's mercy is not moved by any external things. There is nothing in those to engage the justice of God. They are far from being meritorious. There is nothing to engage the faithfulness of God. God has made so absolute promises to any hypocritical prayers.

(2.) That God has a liberty to bestow his grace upon whom he will. Mercy is God's own, and he will make choice who shall be the subjects of it. God is master of his own gifts ; will bestow them on one, and deny them to others. It is just for God to deny all sinners saving mercy ; but if he pleases to have mercy upon some, none may prescribe who they shall be ; but he may choose one, and refuse another, 1 Cor. iv. 7.

(3.) That God never did bestow saving mercy upon any sinner, while he quarrelled against his proceedings. Before ever others had mercy, their spirits were brought

down, and they were brought to justify God, and lie as his feet. If they had stood it out as he does, they would have gone without saving mercy, Isai. xlv. 23. To me every knee shall bow.

5. If he objects, that he has done what he can, and yet God denies grace to him: He should not think much of it, if he gave way to a sluggish spirit, and carried himself viciously, but he does what he can, and what would God have more: He may be told,

(1.) That if he does what he can, he may not challenge mercy from thence. By what law will he demand saving because of that? That does not in its nature take away God's liberty and his sovereignty. There is no wrong done him, if God sees cause to deny him; neither is there any promise whereby God has obliged himself to those that do all they can. God has left it in his own liberty to deny them, if he pleases.

(2.) That he does not do what he can. It may be he is otherwise very faulty but however he does not do what he can, because he does not own the sovereignty of God. He does not justify God, nor ac-

knowledge that God may justly reject him after all. Indeed, he cannot do this without help from God ; so he cannot pray and reform without assistance. Yet this is a thing that he can do. Principles of nature may produce this effect ; many natural men have come to this. Men that have no spiritual principle have resigned up themselves to God ; their mouths have been stopped, and they have become guilty before God.

6. If he objects, that God requires him to believe, whereas it is not in his power : He is dead in sin, and yet God binds him to believe, and calls on him to believe ; this seems very hard and strange : He may be told,

(1.) That though he has lost his power to obey, yet God has not lost his right to command. If he has lost his strength, yet God has not lost his authority. If a servant make himself drunk, and be not able to do his master's business, that is no excuse. God gave man power at first, and his prodigality does not deliver him from God's authority.

(2.) That in this way, God is pleased many times to work faith. Men are able

to do many things in order to believing, and hereby they are put upon it to prepare for that ; and in that way many have faith wrought in them. There have been multitudes, by the blessing of God on the preaching of the Gospel, brought to embrace Jesus Christ.

Twenty-sixth. Sometimes the man says, he is afraid to do any thing in religion ; for whatever he does, he is ready to trust to it. If he prays, fasts, reads, especially if he does these things with any affection, he trusts in his conscientiousness. In this case he may be told,

I. That he may not neglect his duty by any means. He must be sure to attend his duty, whatever ill use his heart may be ready to make of it. He must not scare himself from his duty, because he is ready to trust in it. Duty must be done ; God's command must be attended to, whatever be the consequence of it. Men may not take upon them to judge, when it is best to attend God's command, and when it is dangerous, and so give themselves a dispensation from their duty. As men must not do

evil, that good may come from it, so they may not neglect good, lest evil come of that. Men must do their duty, and run the adventure of their hearts making a bad use thereof.

II. There is no necessity of men's trusting to what they do. If God do but open their eyes, to see the plague of their own hearts, they will not trust to what they do. When men are thoroughly convinced of the abominations that are in their hearts, and see the hypocrisy and formality of their duties, it is impossible they should trust in them. Their confidence in their duties arises from the opinion they have of them, and when they come to understand the wretchedness of them, their hearts will not gather confidence, but fear of them ; and therefore it is their duty to study their own hearts, and labour to find out the wickedness of them.

Twenty-seventh. When the man is told that there is a necessity of seeing his own heart, in order to his humiliation, sometimes he objects that he is blind, and cannot see ; how can a blind man see his own heart ? He may be told,

I. That he is indeed spiritually blind, and therefore he cannot see the evil of sin ; that it is not to be seen until men have received a spiritual understanding from God ; and accordingly there is no necessity of seeing that, in order to his humiliation.

II. But yet he is capable to have an experimental sight of the badness of his own heart. Natural conscience is able to discern that. Men may find by experience, that they are under the power of pride, of discontent, and carnal affection. And that they are utterly destitute of love to God, or any gracious disposition. These things are not discerned by a spiritual eye, but by a natural eye. Natural men may observe and discern the workings of their own hearts, Rom. vii. 8. Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.

Twenty-eighth. Sometimes the man says, he is willing to believe in Christ, but finds himself unable. He would be glad he could believe, but it is beyond him. In this case he may be told,

I. That there is a mighty opposition in

the hearts of natural men to believing in Christ ; as it is with all other spiritual duties, so it is with this. Men do not love to believe in Christ, but have a contrariety thereunto, Job v. 40. Matt. xxiii. 37. The opposition arises partly from pride. They had rather be saved by their own works, that they may have somewhat to glory in. It is very cross to their haughty spirit to go out of themselves and be beholden to Christ alone for salvation, to have nothing of their own to glory in. Men do not love to see themselves nothing. And partly it arises from fear. It seems to them a terrible thing to venture upon Christ. They are not certain that God is free to accept them. They are not certain whether Christ's righteousness be sufficient for them. They do not see the encouragement that is in the gospel, and think it an unlikely thing that they shall be safe in such a way. Hence they have a trembling in their heart. They look upon it too great a venture. They fear it will be looked upon to be presumption, and that instead of mending their condition, they shall make it worse. They should be afraid to stay away from Christ ; but they are

afraid to come to him, and therefore are not willing.

II. If the man were willing, what keeps him from Christ? The difficulty lies in the will, if the will be conquered, the man is conquered. Yea, faith in Christ is an act of the will. Faith is a choosing of Christ for his Saviour. Christ is offered to men, and many encouragements are presented before them. And when once the will is gained to accept the offer, the man does believe on Christ. If men are willing, the difficulty would be at an end. They cannot be willing until they are able. They are not willing until the will is strengthened to comply with God's call.

III. That seeming willingness which is in many men is but feigned. They pretend a willingness to quiet their consciences. But they do not, it may be, feel much opposition. But they are not indeed willing. They are willing to be saved, and willing to be saved by Christ, rather than not be saved at all; and have some selfish desires that they could come to Christ, but there is no sincerity in them.

Twenty-ninth. Sometimes the man says, that he would fain submit to the will of God, but cannot tell how. He has been striving after it a great while, but cannot attain it. In this case he may be told,

That natural men do never sincerely strive after submission to God. They strive to submit after a fashion, and pray that they may, because they hear that it is necessary in order to conversion, but they are never sincere in it. They do it in a false and deceitful way. Which appears,

1. Because they are labouring to make their hearts better. They are labouring to mend themselves, and upon this account they labour after it, that they may not be necessitated to submit to the will of God ; that their own goodness may be a bond upon God to save them ; that it may not be in the free liberty of God, to do what he pleases with them. And upon this account they strive to submit to God, that they may make a righteousness of that.

2. Because at the same time they are hiding their own hearts from themselves. They are afraid to see how bad they are. If they have any convictions of their own badness,

they will stifle them if they can. They are labouring to excuse themselves, and love to look upon any thing in themselves that seems like goodness. They are persuading themselves that they are better than they are ; all which are great hinderances to submission.

3. Because they are not thoroughly convinced of a necessity of submission to God. If they were convinced of a necessity of it, they would do it; and if they be not convinced of it, they cannot strive sincerely after it. As long as men hope that they may make a shift without it, they will not heartily seek after it. As long as they hope that their own righteousness will lay a bond upon God, and that it is not fair for God to condemn them, they will not heartily endeavour after submission.

Thirtieth — When men are called upon to submit to God, and resign up themselves to his sovereignty, they say they do so ; they cannot help themselves, but must justify God. In this case there is great need to examine whether their submission be of the right kind, for there is a show of sub-

mission, which is not real humiliation. And there are those signs of a false submission,

I. When it is the fruit of their own strivings. Men hear that they must submit themselves to God, before they obtain mercy, and accordingly they strive for it, and work up a kind of image of submission to God. They bring themselves to own that they are in God's hands, and he may do what he will with them. This is never right. When men are brought to submit to God indeed, the thing is forced by the power of conviction. They strive against it, but were so evidently convinced of the insufficiency of themselves, and the justice of God, that they had no other way left them, but to fall into the hands of God, as it was with those lepers, 2 Kings vii. 4.

II. When men make a righteousness of their submission. When men have got a false submission, they are wont to be proud of that, and to think that God will be taken with them. They look upon it a choice frame of spirit, and rejoice in it as a thing pleasing to God. But, when men do indeed

submit to God, they see nothing in it to be proud of. They see themselves all over defiled like lepers, empty of all good, and look upon this submission as having nothing at all of goodness in it. They see they are merely forced to it, that they have no other way to take, but to fall into the hands of God.

III. When, notwithstanding their submission, they are still striving to make their hearts better. If you ask them whether they are striving to love God, and to do duties for his glory, they say yes ; they are labouring after it. You may be sure they do not submit to God, but are labouring to get some goodness of their own to commend them to God. They are not sensible of their own impotency. But if a man do indeed submit to God, he sees himself dead in trespasses and sins. Ask him whether he be striving to make his heart better, he will say, he can as easily remove a mountain as do it. That he has been striving after it a great while, but now he finds he has no power. His heart is as dead as a stone. There is no disposition to any thing that is

good in him. It is quite out of his reach. If God does not make him better, it will never be effected.

IV. When they say they have been brought to that many a time. When some men are inquired of, whether they are brought to submit to God's sovereignty? Yes, they say, many a time. Sinners in trouble of conscience say it has been so oftentimes with them. This shows it is not a right submission. Godly men, after their conversion, may submit many times to God, but that submission differs much from this. That is a gracious submission, and they do not see themselves at the same time utterly destitute of all grace; but that submission that goes before the closing with Christ, is never wrought any more than once. When it is wrought, it may continue some little time, till God reveals Christ to a man. But this work is never wrought over and over again in the soul.

V. When men are afraid they are not humbled enough. Some men that do pretend to submission, are afraid that they are not humbled enough, and they wish they may

be humbled more ; this makes it evident that they do not indeed submit ; it is a sign that they make a righteousness of their submission. When men do indeed submit to God, they are never exercised with any such scruples, because they do not look upon their submission as a thing that commends them to God. When a man submits, he absolutely resigns up himself as a prisoner to God ; is wholly broken off from his own righteousness and sufficiency, and leaves himself with God. He does not do it under a notion that there is an excellency in it, but out of necessity leaves himself with God.

VI. When men submit to God as looking upon him not very angry. Some sinners submit to God, and at the same time they think they have some love to God, and some care of his glory ; and accordingly they look upon their peace as half made. Truly this is no difficult matter. It is easy for a man to put his life in the hands of his friend. There is no great opposition to submit to God, when a man is pretty confident that God will save him ; but it is another thing to submit to God, when a man does not see

a spark of goodness in himself; when he looks upon God as bitterly angry with him, and is much afraid that God will utterly destroy him. When men submit under such circumstances, it is evident that God has conquered them, and that their wills are broken.

Question. What is to be said to a man in case he should say he was willing to be damned?

Answer 1. No man acting understandingly is willing to be damned. All ungodly men do interpretatively love damnation; Prov. viii. 36, but no man that understands himself, is willing to be damned. It is against nature; nature teaches every man to desire happiness. Damnation is a dreadful terror to them that know what it is, Is. xxxiii. 14.

2. No such thing is required of men. For God has put a spirit of self-love into men, and binds them to love themselves; and commands men to be seeking salvation, John vi. 27. Luke xiii. 24.

3. Such willingness is either only pretended; or if real, it must arise either from

desperate rage and passion, or from some violent pangs of false affection to God. The Spirit of God does not stir up such workings in the hearts of men.

Thirty-first. Sometimes a sinner does inquire how he may come to know his own heart? He is told that it is needful for him to know it, and inquires what he should do in order to it. In this case he may be directed to these three ways :

I. To observe the sinful workings of his own heart. The hearts of men are often working in a way of pride, discontent, worldliness, envy, &c. And by observing these, a man may learn abundance of the badness of his own heart ; if he does consider with himself, how far such a spirit would carry him, if God did not restrain it. As when a man sees the fire burn the wood on the hearth, he gathers that it would consume the house too, if not restrained.

II. To examine those shows of goodness that the heart makes. The heart makes in many, shows of goodness ; sometimes of sorrow for sin ; of love to God, to godly people, of love to ordinances, of desires to

be converted; of believing the word of God, of humility, of patience, of thankfulness. And the way to know the heart, is to search whether it be not false in these appearances. To examine the ends and motions of those frames and workings of heart, whether the root of them be not self-love, fear of hell, hope of merit, &c.

III. To try his heart, by supposing some suitable cases to it. As he may suppose to himself, that such godly men as he pretends great love to, should slight and despise him; that God should take away such a child from him; that God should convert some others, and leave him under guilt and terrors; that his estate should be lost; that there should come persecuting times, that should kill him, if he would not carry sinfully; that God should now come to take away his life, before he is converted. By questioning seriously with himself, what he thinks he should do in such cases, he may come to have more understanding in his own heart. Changes of condition, make great discoveries of the heart; and supposed changes sometimes, do a pretty deal that

way. Such questions, if seriously considered, may be as touchstones, to discover what is in the heart. The answer of the heart to such inquiries, may give men a great deal of light to see themselves by.

Question. How does God show men the badness of their own hearts ?

Answer 1. The means whereby God effects it, is by leading men into temptation. Men in continuance of time, fall into temptation, and so the vizard falls off from their hearts, and they come to have an understanding of the plague that is therein. Sometimes, by reason of some temptations, they are drawn into some moral evil, and that discovers their hypocrisy and corruption. Sometimes temptations prevail upon them to make them worldly and proud. Sometimes by afflictions, the discontentment of their hearts is stirred up ; so by God's not hearing their prayers, by converting other persons. Sometimes by hearing the doctrine of God's sovereignty, or the strictness of the law. Sometimes the word of God, and sometimes the works of God, are temptations to them, and occasion them to be

dead to that which is good, and make their corruptions work violently. Rom. vii. 5. Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.

2. As to the manner, it is done gradually. God does not lead men at once into the understanding of their own hearts ; as the surgeon by degrees comes to the bottom of the sore. God could at once make men see the bottom of their own hearts, as when the jailer was converted. But in this way men would not have such experience of the deceitful turnings and windings of their own hearts. But he generally shows it them by degrees, and they are a long while before they come to an understanding of them. They see something of their hearts, and then grow into a pretty good opinion of them again. They have many partial discoveries of their hearts. Sometimes they go forward in discerning their hearts, and then go backward again. They get the ground, and then they lose it ; they seem as if they would presently come to an understanding of them, and then there is a stop put for a pretty while. A great deal of time is con-

sumed, before they come to have a thorough understanding of themselves. Men are sometimes years under trouble before they do attain unto it.

Question. What must men know of their own hearts, before they be converted ?

Answer. In general, they must know so much as is sufficient to bring them off from trusting in their own righteousness, and their own strength. Some men know a great deal more of their own hearts than other men ; they see many particular deceits and workings of corruption, that other men do not see ; and no man knows his own heart so before conversion, but he may learn a great deal more after he is converted. But so much must be known by every man, as is sufficient to break him off from trusting in himself. It is the sight of his own heart, that does take him off from trusting in himself. Let him hear never so much about the insufficiency of his own righteousness, he will trust in himself, until he sees his own heart ; but when he sees that thoroughly, it is impossible he should trust in himself, for he sees there is nothing there to trust unto.

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Particularly, 1. He must see himself under the reigning power of sin. If men imagine that they have no great disposition to sin, or that their corruptions are in any degree mortified, they will commend themselves to God upon that account ; and will not see it just and fair for God to condemn them. There is no absolute necessity they should have the particular consideration of every corruption that is in their hearts. But they must see that they are under the dominion of sin, that a spirit of self-love reigns in them, and that their heart is contrary to that which is good. They find such workings of pride, discontention, and enmity to Christ, as shows to them they have abominable hearts ; that their hearts are like the hearts of devils, as full of sin, as a toad is of poison. Rom. vii. 9.

2. To be empty of all goodness ; that he has no inclination to any thing that is good, that there is no disposition to that which is good, but a total emptiness. It may be, he does not think particularly of every grace, that he is destitute of that, but sees that he is utterly void of spiritual life ; that he has

no power to do any good. He is dead in sin, wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Before that he was convinced of a weakness, but now he finds himself dead ; he thought before he had little, but now he sees he has none. There is not one spark of goodness in him, nor any power to get any. He is stript out of all his perfections, and sees an utter emptiness in himself of all that is good. He has no love, no godly sorrow, no thankfulness, no humility, no spiritual desires. Those appearances that he had, are all vanished out of sight ; he cannot do any thing, there is no seed of any goodness in him. If he be advantaged with all manner of helps, yet it is quite beyond his power to work up any good frame in his heart. He prays, but there is no goodness in his prayers, and he is incapable of working up any. He is not in a swoon ; rubbing, and chafing, will not fetch him to life ; but he is everlastingly dead in sin, unless God will put a principle of life into him.

Thirty-second. Sometimes the man says,

that he sees he can do nothing of himself. In this case he may be told,

That the best saint in the world can do nothing of himself, John xv. 14. Those that do a great deal for God, and have a gracious principle, do yet know that they can do nothing of themselves. And a natural man may stand convinced of this, that he can do nothing of himself, though he be very proud, and imagines that he does God a great deal of choice service. When he says, he can do nothing of himself, he only means, that he can do nothing without assistance from God. This a man may see, and yet be a great stranger to his own heart. The thing that he wants to see, is, that he has no principle of doing any good ; that there is no power, nor inclination in him ; but that he is totally and everlastingly dead in sin, unless God infuse a new principle in him.

Thirty-third. Sometimes men have great discoveries of their own hearts, for a pretty while together, and yet do not come to lie at God's feet. They say themselves, they cannot do it. In this case they may be told,

I. That they cannot deliver themselves ; that it is utterly impossible for them to mend their own hearts. For men may see themselves bad, and insufficient, yet not be brought to despair as to their own power, by nourishing a secret hope, that in time, with some advantages, their hearts will be brought to a better pass. Therefore it is better to possess them with a sense of their utter insufficiency to help themselves. They may as well make a world, as make their own hearts good ; they cannot work faith in themselves, John vi. 44.

II. That they cannot deserve that God should give grace to them. They cannot force God to work regeneration in them. They have no natural excellency to engage God. They cannot work upon the mercy of God, nor engage the justice of God to save them. God is not bound to them, to help them. There is nothing to hinder him if he pleases, there is nothing to oblige him. They cannot compel God. God is free to help them, or deny them help, as it pleases him.

III. That it is dangerous to stand it out

long against God. If they do not yield, they are in danger, either to be left of God to a senseless spirit, or to get a false confidence, or to be snatched away out of the world. Men stand in slippery places, that continue to be stubborn against great conviction. It is not long before the scale will turn. If they do not quickly submit, there is danger of their rejection.

Thirty-fourth. Sometimes the man says, he can justify God now, however he deals with him ; and yet it is evident that he is not brought off from his own righteousness. In this case he may be told,

I. That he must beware that he does not make a righteousness of this. Pride will feed upon any appearance of good qualifications, and if he looks upon it that now his heart is made better than it was, and that God is taken with him, he will greatly deceive himself. His justifying of God, is no justification of himself ; his justifying of God, will not make God to justify him. Though he justifies God, yet God condemns him.

II. That some men do justify God, from a partial conviction of the righteousness of

their condemnation. Conscience takes notice of their sinfulness, and tells them that they may righteously be damned ; as Pharaoh, who justified God, Exod. ix. 27. And they give some kind of consent to it, but many times it does not continue. They have only a pang upon them, that usually dies away after a little time. This justifying of God differs much from that which does immediately go before conversion, which is a fixed and thorough conviction, arising from a thorough understanding of their own hearts.

Thirty-fifth. Sometimes the man seems to be upon the very borders of despair. For he is nearer to it a great deal than others ; he is in anguish of spirit, and does almost conclude, that there is no mercy for him. In this case he may be told,

I. That there is no help in any creature. He cannot help himself ; he has no wisdom, power, nor worthiness that can help him. There is no way that he can take that is sufficient for his deliverance. Ministers are not able to deliver him, and if others pray for him, yet that will not secure his salvation. All creatures are cyphers, and can-

not work out any salvation for him. If God will destroy him, there is none that can save him.

II. That God may help him. It is not beyond the power of God to change his heart. And it is not beyond the grace of God to help him. The reason that men are not pardoned, is not the greatness of their sins, but, because they do not come to Jesus Christ—That though God be angry, yet he should not be discouraged. God is always angry with sinners, when he comes to bestow converting grace upon them—That God has done a great deal for him, inasmuch as he makes him sensible of his danger—That these discoveries of danger are many times forerunners of conversion—That his condition is a great deal more hopeful now, than when he was pleasing himself with his frames and attainments. Every man must despair in himself, before he comes to trust in Christ—That there is enough in Christ; he is able to save to the uttermost, Heb. vii. 15. Christ came to save the chief of sinners, 1 Tim. i. 15.

III. That there is no way left him now

but to yield himself into the hands of God. If God destroy him, he may ; he lies at the mere mercy of God. If God will deliver him, he may ; if he does not, he does no wrong. He cannot run from God ; he cannot force God. If he stands it out against God, he takes a way to ruin himself. The safest course he can take is to fall into the hands of God. It may be God may help him. However, he can but perish.

Thirty-sixth. Sometimes a little before the work of God is completed in him, he complains, that he seems to be as before he was under convictions, careless and senseless. His terrors have left him, and he is not affected with his condition.

In this case he may be told,

I. that he now may see what a heart he has, and how insufficient he is to deliver himself. His heart is empty of all that is good, and there is no possibility of his obtaining salvation by his own power. He has no principle of grace, nor never had. The frames that formerly he had, were nothing else, but the workings of self love and natural conscience, and unless God does deliver him, he will never attain unto life.

II. That his way must be to wait upon God still. This is no sign that God has given him over. His terrors may quickly return again, and he may find mercy for all this. When he had his good frames and affections, they could not save him, nor make his peace with God. And if God do show him his own emptiness he may quickly after discover to him the excellency of Christ.

Thirty-seventh. At length the man seems as if he were thoroughly brought off from himself, and brought to lie at the foot of God. All his selfish hopes are taken away; he sees his own heart, and his will bows; he seems to resign up himself to God. In this case,

I. It is best to examine whether there be no deceit in it. Sometimes it is so plain, that there is no great occasion to examine. Sometimes it is more doubtful. When they are thoroughly humbled, such things as these do occur.

1. He sees all his own righteousness to be utterly empty and vile. That it has no power to draw the heart of God. He sees nothing at all to commend him, but he has provoked God thereby.

2. He is at an end of his contrivances to change his heart. Formerly, when things appeared dark unto him, he was wont to think that if he did thus, or so, that would bring him into a more hopeful way. But now he is beyond all his contrivances, he cannot do any more.

3. He sees his heart spiritually dead. He is utterly destitute of power to do any thing. Yea, he has no inclination to any good.

4. He sees he is in God's hands. It is free for God to do as he will with him, and he resigns up himself to God. So he is more quiet now than he was, both because his will is brought down, and he is satisfied that God can, and may help him.

II. It is no ways fit to tell a man that God will have mercy on him. For though this be the manner of God, when men are prepared for grace, to bestow grace upon them, yet there is no promise in the scripture made to such persons. The promises are made to coming to Christ. Faith is the condition of salvation, and there be many promises made to humility, yet are there none made to humiliation. And he is

told that he is in God's hands ; God is at liberty to do as he will with him ; and that he must wait upon God to open his eyes, and show Jesus Christ unto him.

III. It is very meet to set the Gospel before him, and mind him of God's sending Christ into the world to save sinners ; that Jesus Christ has satisfied the justice of God ; and performed perfect obedience for us ; that God has pardoned many through Christ ; that he offers salvation to him through Jesus Christ ; that God has promised eternal life to all that do accept of Christ ; that those that have nothing shall be welcome to him ; that God is of infinite mercy, and delights to glorify his grace in saving the chief of sinners ; that because we had no worthiness, God has provided a worthiness for us in Christ ; that Christ is the author of eternal salvation, to all that come to him ; that God's love is free, and there is no danger in venturing upon Christ ; whoever believeth on him shall not be confounded.

Question. Is there at that time any true meltings of heart, because of sin ? Is the soul truly grieved for its sins against God, as some men have thought ?

Answer. That though there be such a conviction of sin as makes men to justify God, yet there is no godly sorrow for sin. Men are not at this time affected with godly sorrow,

1. Because such sorrow is inconsistent with the work of humiliation. When the sinner is humbled, he sees himself emptied of himself, and sees his own heart dead in sin. This could not be, if he had any gracious sorrow for sin; if there were true sorrow for sin, there must be love to God, a spiritual understanding, a new heart, a divine principle put into the man; for nature cannot produce any such effect.

2. Because faith is the first act of grace. If the man had a gracious principle, he would immediately entertain Christ and the Gospel. After a man has received a principle of regeneration, the first way that it works in him, is by drawing the heart to Christ. When men's hearts are changed, and a new nature put into them, it does not first work in a way of sorrow for sin, or thirsting after God's glory, or delighting in holiness; but always the first act of grace is

to close with Christ. God leads him into the exercise of this, that he may be justified. Rom. v. 2. If he did any other gracious act, before this, it could not be accepted, for the person is not accepted before faith. All sanctification is the fruit of faith. Acts. xxvi. 16.

Thirty-eighth. Soon after the soul is brought to lie at God's feet, he is wont to give an account of his closing with Christ ; that God has revealed Christ to him, and drawn his heart to him, and he does accept of Christ. In this case it is best to examine,

I. Whether his faith be right. And in this work there is no weight to be laid on it, whether it was in hearing, reading, praying, or meditating, that God gave the light to him. God does not confine himself to any of those ways : neither is there any weight to be laid upon it, whether it was by any particular word, or without it. If it be according to the word, it is sufficient, nor must we lay weight upon it whether it were by a word of promise, or some other passage of the Gospel ; nor whether he had

one word come to him, or many. Sometimes many promises flow in, one after another, in abundance. But special inquiry is to be made,

1. What condition he was in just before ; whether he was wholly emptied of himself, or found any imaginary goodness in himself. If his humiliation was right, there is no doubt of his faith.

2. Whether by that light that was given him, he saw Christ and salvation offered to him, or whether he saw that God loved or pardoned him ; for the offer of grace, and our acceptance, goes before pardon, and therefore much more before the knowledge of it.

3. Whether he saw a glorious fulness in Christ, a sufficiency for the greatest sinners, so as to make him admire the excellency of Christ.

4. Whether the offer came with divine authority ; whether he saw God calling of him, so that he could not but accept thereof.

II. If upon inquiry the case be more doubtful, as it may be, partly because some things were not so clear to himself, or be-

cause he has forgotten some material thing, and cannot speak of it, it may be well to tell him, that if it be right, he will see more of it. When God begins to make a discovery of Christ, he will not leave men, but is wont to show them more. The path of the just is like the morning light, &c. Prov. 4.

III. If the case be plain, it is best to encourage him, though there is no need to be positive. But he may be told, that it is hopeful that God has drawn his heart to Christ, and made a gracious change in his soul; and that if he does indeed believe on Christ, he shall certainly be saved. His sin does not make such a breach between God and him, as to hazard his salvation.

IV. To warn him to depend still on the free grace of God in Christ. He must expect many dark hours, and times of temptations, but his way must be, to grow in the knowledge of Christ. He must not think that now he shall always live a life of joy and comfort. Satan will be busy with him, and he will have many workings, both of carnal confidence and unbelief; and he must

get more and more convinced of his own emptiness, and the fulness of Christ. If he live many years, he must never expect any thing to glory in, but Christ Jesus. And he is likewise to be warned, that he live up to the mercy of God to him; that he does not fall into a languishing and pinning condition, but maintain the life and power of godliness, that so he may not expose himself to temptation and darkness, and that he may not dishonour the holy name of God; showing forth the virtue of him that has called him out of darkness, into his marvellous light.

Thirty-ninth. There be two particular cases that do require a particular consideration.

I. The first case is, when a minister is sent for, by a man upon his sick-bed. The first thing to be done, is to get an understanding in what condition the man is. For though a man that does not know his case, may speak several things that may be safe and profitable, whatever his condition is; yet the more knowledge there is of the state

of the man, the more advantage he has to speak pertinently.

1. If it be plain that the man is in a natural condition, it is most proper to insist upon these three things :

(1.) That he has a present absolute necessity to be at peace with God ; that if he should die in a natural condition, he will be for ever undone. It is very fit he should be remembered of his sinful life, and the dreadfulfulness of that punishment that hangs over his head ; which may be set before him in an affecting manner, that if it be possible he may be terrified, and made sensible of those eternal miseries that are coming upon him.

(2.) That he may not rest in any thing short of Jesus Christ. Men in such a case are like a man drowning, ready to catch hold of any thing that comes near. They are ready to have a dependence upon their privileges, upon their parentage, upon their sorrow for their transient life, and upon their purposes to live better. God raise them up again. He must be led into an understanding of the strictness of the law of God, and the vanity of all carnal confidences.

(3.) That there is a glorious way of life prepared by Christ, who has fulfilled the law, and wrought out eternal salvation for us ; that the gift of God is eternal life : and that the mercy of God is free, and God does not refuse any that do hearken to the call of the gospel ; that God will as readily receive him if he comes to Christ, as if he were likely to live many years and do service to God in the world.

And if his particular temptations may be discerned, care must be taken to remove them. If he be under any special discouragement, or any flattering delusion, the snare, if it be possible, must be broken. He must be showed the vanity of that temptation. Such light must be held out to him, that if God will bless it, he may be delivered.

If at that time, or any other afterwards, he does pretend to believe in Christ, it is very meet, that he be cautioned that he does not deceive himself ; for sick-bed repentances are seldom true. Many persons that made great pretensions when sick, have proved very badly after their recovery.

2. If it be doubtful whether the man is in a natural condition, or converted ; as there may be some occasion to hope, because of his profession, because of his estimation among men, because of an orderly carriage ; and yet occasion to fear, because there is no great evidence of grace, either in his conversation before, or discourse at present : sometimes there is more grounds for hope, sometimes for fear—These three things may safely be spoken to him.

(1.) The doctrines of the law and gospel may be set before him. They may be somewhat explained and cleared up. It is fit men should be remembered of the rule they are to be judged by. Many times when the rule is clearly laid down, conscience makes application, and witnesses to men how it is with them, Heb. iv. 12. The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, &c.

(2.) Promises may be applied conditionally. He may be told, that if he has been thoroughly broken off from himself, and brought to rely upon Christ, God has accepted of him ; that if his heart has been

drawn by gospel encouragements to rely on Christ, he is out of danger ; that if God's glory be upon his heart indeed, he is an heir of glory. He may be told, that only his conscience 'can tell what the workings of his heart has been ; that if he be not mistaken, but has indeed made Christ his refuge, all his sins are pardoned.

(3.) He may be warned that he does not deceive himself. It may be meet to remember him, that the heart is deceitful ; that many false hearts do go hoping out of the world ; that there be several things that do resemble faith, and every grace may be counterfeited ; that he hath need to beg of God to discover things plainly to him ; that it would be a dreadful thing to be mistaken. And so he may be charged, that he do not trust in any thing in himself, but betake himself alone to Christ.

3. If it be considerably plain, that he is converted and gracious ; either from his known eminency in religion, or from an account that he gives of communion with God, or discoveries of Christ and the gracious workings of his heart, it may be very

meet to comfort him with those great and precious promises that God has made; to remember him of the freeness of God's grace, and the preciousness of the blood of Christ. He may be minded of those things that are pillars of our faith, and the foundations of our comfort; how God in all ages of the world has proposed this way of salvation; in this way the saints of old have lived and died; how the faithfulness of God stands engaged for their salvation; that their sins and iniquities are cast behind God's back. This must be understood or spoken upon a supposition that the work is a thorough work.

In case he desires the minister to tell what he judges about his sincerity, it may be suitable to tell him, that as far as he can discern, his heart is upright, and that the root of the matter is found in him. He must tell him that he has no infallible knowledge. God alone does know the hearts of men. There is no depending on his judgment, but so far as he can perceive, his soul has been renewed by the spirit of God.

If the man has any particular temptations,

it is very suitable to remove them. He may be under temptation, because he has great deadness, a great deal of pride and hypocrisy, because he has not had so much discovery of the favour of God, as he perceives others have had, because many have been mistaken, because God has afflicted him very much, because he is withdrawn now in the time of his sickness. Such particular temptations are to be answered. It may be showed to him, that the dealings of God are various with his people. That such things are not inconsistent with grace, that the best way is to live upon the free mercy of God in Christ.

II. The other case is, when such persons as have made a high profession of religion for a long while, are in darkness about their condition.

1. In this case, the first care of the minister must be, to get satisfaction concerning the state of the person, whether he be regenerate or not. Not but that many things may be spoken that may be profitable to them, whether they be sincerely godly or not. But if the minister do not know their condition, he cannot apply proper remedies.

And he may speak that which may be very dangerous, if he supposes the man to be unconverted. When he is converted, he may torment him, and discourage him needlessly. If he supposes the man converted, when he is not, he may do him much damage by comforting him up in a false way. Therefore it is very needful that he do get what satisfaction he can about their condition, that so he may be helpful to them in their distresses.

In order to his passing a right judgment upon their condition, he must be careful that he do not lay too much weight upon them, that they have been in church-fellowship many years, that their carriage has been orderly, that they were well accounted of where they live. For these are very fallible signs; such things are common to saints and hypocrites, though these things may be grounds of charity. But a minister had needs have better grounds to go upon, when he comforts up persons with hopes of reconciliation.

Neither must he lay too much weight on bad signs, that are not demonstrative. If the man do not know the time of his conversion, or first closing with Christ, if he

have any notable blemish, if he be not well accounted of, the minister may not draw any presumptory conclusion from thence that he is not godly. Yea, if he do judge himself confidently to be unconverted, it is best to inquire somewhat further into it.

It is best discovered by three sorts of inquiries :

(1.) Whether they have passed through the several steps of the work of conversion. Some can give so full an account thereof, as will abundantly satisfy the minister that the work is right. Some are so strangely to seek,* that he may be much confirmed that they have no grace. In some others, after they have given what account they can, the work is more dubious.

(2.) Whether they have lived a life of sanctification. There is a great diversity in the measures of sanctification, that men have attained unto. Every holy man lives a holy life. And by inquiring, what knowledge they have of God? Whether they

* To seek, is an adverbial mode of expression, signifying at a loss.—JOHNSON.

prize the glory of God? Whether they hate all sin? Whether they do draw their encouragement from Christ? Whether they love holiness, for holiness' sake? What conflict they have with pride, unbelief, a self-righteous spirit and self-love? A minister may come to a competent satisfaction, whether they be in a state of grace or not. In discoursing such things with them, a man may many times feel the workings of the Spirit of holiness.

(3.) Whether they have had sensible communion with God. God is wont at times to draw nigh to the souls of his people; sometimes in meditation; sometimes in prayer, and in other ordinances, and to make discoveries of himself, and of Jesus Christ to their souls, and to draw their hearts to him. And if there has been any thing considerable that way, the minister may be well satisfied of their good estate.

2. In case the minister be satisfied that the man is not converted, he must use his prudence to judge whether it will be for the man's profit, that he do in plain terms tell him so. Sometimes it may be a prejudice,

and a means to exasperate him ; sometimes there is no such danger, but he may freely tell him what he judges, and the reasons of his judgment. But in case he do not see it his way to tell the man his thoughts concerning him, yet he ought in conscience, in the wisest way he can, put him into the understanding of his own condition. He may not suffer the man to go away with an opinion that he thinks well of him ; much less may he leave him ignorant of such rules whereby he may come to understand his condition. It becomes him to lay such signs of trial before him, as are most likely to bring him to a sight of himself, and convince him of his dangerous estate.

3. In case the minister be satisfied on good grounds about the man's good estate, he ought to endeavour to clear it up to the man ; laying convincing light before him, and answering those temptations that make it doubtful to the man himself. And also to direct him in such ways wherein it is hopeful that God will help him and deliver him from his temptations.





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